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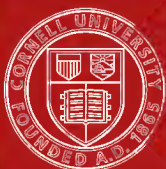
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MARCEL TINAYRE. FROM A RECENT PORTRAIT

THE SHADOW OF LOVE

THE SHADOW
:: OF LOVE ::
BY MARCELLE TINAYRE
TRANSLATED BY ALFRED ALLINSON

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THE SHADOW OF LOVE

THE SHADOW OF LOVE

CHAPTER I

THE tick-tack of the old timepiece seemed to stop. Something creaked and groaned, and from the depths of the quaint, coffin-shaped case issued a little cracked, melancholy voice, as if reluctant to strike the hour that heralded the twilight of a winter's day.

Denise Cayrol sat sewing, her work spread across her knees. She was tired, and quite ready to lean back a little and rest against the back of her chair. Two windows, draped with white curtains, admitted a diffused light into the dining-room. The walnut-wood sideboard, with its four doors and twisted pilasters, occupied a recess at the farther end. A scarlet bar of fire marked the outline of the stove-door. Coloured lithographs in black frames loomed faintly from the grey panelled woodwork of the walls. The faded gilt of a barometer gleamed between two stuffed heads of tame roebuck.

Piles of sheets lay on the table and a basket of fruit beside them, so that the great room with its tiled floor, always a little damp, had a combined odour of cellar, new-washed linen and ripe apples.

Denise passed her hand softly over her eyes, and

her thimble, worn thin on the fingers of her grandmother and mother, now both dead, threw a silvery reflection on her fair temple.

She called to her companion: "Fortunade!" But the peasant seamstress did not hear and never stirred. Seated in a window-recess, with bowed back and raised knees, her feet resting on a foot-warmer, she was only a sketchy, indistinct shadow against the whiteness of the curtain.

"Fortunade! It's impossible to see any longer. Leave your work, my girl, and go and ask Françoisette for the lamp."

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

The shadow grew into substance, emerging from the muslin folds. The scissors fell with a rattle to the floor, and Fortunade vanished.

Mademoiselle Cayrol rose, picked up the scissors and put them back on a stool with the needle-cases and bobbins. Then she stood a while in a brown study, enveloped in the light folds of the white curtain, gazing out at the landscape, now grown so familiar she had ceased to admire it.

There was first of all a narrow strip of garden in front of the house ending in an iron gate, and a larger piece to the right forming a terrace raised above the road. Looking over the wall and through the light wire fence that surmounted it, Denise could see the gorge of the Monadouze, its scarped and crannied rock-walls of blue-grey granite, the bright green mosses and large-leaved ivies that clothed them, and here and there detached groups of silvery-stemmed birches, twisted pines bending

over the abyss and those dwarf oaks whose coppery leaves do not fall till spring comes round again. Beyond lay a vista of intricate valleys and great, undulating hills—vast purple masses under the grey sky. These were the mountains of the Limousin, like vast billows suddenly arrested and turned to stone as they swept on, heaving and falling, in their everlasting march towards the chalky *causses* of the Lot. On the farthest summit the red sunset still burned smokily, like a dying fire.

Already the shades of night were falling on Monadouze; lights appeared on the flanks of the gorge and the roar of the four cascades rose louder and was more distinctly heard in the silence.

Denise did not see the waterfalls, nor the village piled on a projecting point of rock, with its roofs of slate and thatch, its unpretending little church, its feudal castle all dilapidated and open to the weather. Doctor Cayrol's house stood outside Monadouze itself, beside the terraced road that contours the hillside and rejoins the Tulle highway. It stood detached in proud isolation with its tall chimneys, its four-square roof of shining blue slate, its garret windows under their pointed penthouses that looked like so many circumflex accents. Facing south, it was flooded with sun through every window; these all had small, old-fashioned quarrels, some of the panes being dulled and greenish with age. The village with its noises was out of ear-shot, though the church-bells could be plainly heard and the roar of the falls that seemed to envelop the whole house.

Denise loved this wail of the tortured waters that were always changing according to the day and time of year, loud and angry after storm, soft and low in the parched dog-days, swollen and threatening when the high snows are melting in April. Ever since the Cayrols had lived at Monadouze, it had been the unceasing undersong to all the girl's little vexations and modest satisfactions, to all her hard-working, chaste, almost nun-like life.

How sad, how lugubrious, it sounded in the December dark ! It seemed an urgent call for help, a breathless sob of despair rising from the river depths, shaking the rocky foundations of the old house, its walls that had stood for three hundred years, and Denise's heart within her young bosom.

She leant her forehead against the glass, the moist coolness of which made her start, and wondered to feel herself so stirred, so over-sensitive to the melancholy of the time and place . . . Why was it ? She was not of a nervous temperament, but robust and well-balanced, contented with the life she led and which she never wished other than what it was, though she was twenty-seven by this time.

She thought: "I am anxious ; my father is so late !"

She loved her father above everything else in the world. After her mother's death, when Doctor Cayrol had removed her from the Convent school, she had devoted herself heart and soul to him, because he was poor, lonely and misunderstood. She was quite ready to live with him in their native

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district, in this remote village which had never boasted a doctor before and still had its "bon setters" and its "spell-mongers." There, like Balzac's Bénéassis, Cayrol was the representative science, progress, civilization. What struggles for eleven years past, and what mortifications! The Curé's hostility had been sooner appeased than the bitter rancour of the wizard, the *metje**, persecuted, exposed and haled before the courts.

Then there had been the great abortive scheme of a People's Sanatorium, at greatly reduced price to be raised on the barren plateau of the Champ de Brach. A company had been formed, and shares had been subscribed for. Now the unfinished building was crumbling away under the weather and the iron "frames" lay rusting among the fern. The sanatorium was nothing better now than that most dismal of things, a modern ruin, where owls nested and vagabonds slept of nights. The doctor was embroiled with lawyers and business men; his little fortune was compromised and his time cut up with endless inextricable lawsuits.

This was the cause of much secret suffering to Mademoiselle Cayrol,—the one and only grief she had. Resigned to solitude, the pinch of comparative poverty, the virginity of an Antigone, she never asked herself if she were happy or unhappy; she had never yet shed a tear save for other people's sorrows.

The door opened and the lamp filled the room with brightness. The twilight, a dusky ba

* "Mage,"—magician, wizard, in the patois of the Limousin.

fluttering in the pale net of the curtains, flew away incontinently,—and with it the dim fears, the unacknowledged presentiments of evil that hovered over Denise's spirit.

She went back to her chair and work stool and resumed her hemming, installing herself beside Fortunade within the circle of light cast by the lampshade of green cardboard.

The glare fell on the crude white of the linen and the two girls' hands. Fortunade's were sunburnt and distorted by hard, coarse work ; but Denise's, delicate without being effeminate, were like very small and very pretty boys' hands. Higher up, a soft half-light revealed the seamstress's black pelisse and the bodice of her mistress's gown, of a dark stuff only relieved by a thin gold chain that depended from her neck. Under black plaits, scrupulously brushed to either side, Fortunade's face was quite a child's,—rounded brow, dejected profile, tight, peevish-looking mouth. Denise, on the other hand, was a true woman, with broad shoulders and well-developed bosom. Her irregular features were not beautiful, but they were pleasing for all that. The mouth was so bright and fresh, and the teeth so white and even ! Such an expression of candid common sense and genuine kind-heartedness shone in the grey-green eyes ! Her hair was braided in a coronet that went well with the classical outline of the head ; it was fair, the dead gold, almost coppery, tint the November leaves wear,—a rare and lovely shade that altered a little year by year and as age came on would settle

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down into a pretty commonplace chestnut.

"The doctor has taken his bicycle," observed Fortunade, guessing the reason of Mademoiselle Cayrol's anxiety. "He will have the wind again him coming back."

"He will have had to see all the tradespeople . . . Tulle,—the painter and the cabinet-maker. . . They are breaking their promises, and the white room will never be ready by the time Monsieur Jean Favières arrives."

"You don't dislike the idea of taking a boarder?"

"No."

"A sick man you don't know?"

"He is my Uncle Albert Lapeyrie's godson, quite a young man, almost a boy; he is very ill and very unfortunate."

"He has no relations?"

"His mother married again. He lives by himself. He has always lived alone."

"Well, he's in luck's way to find a home with you."

For a month past the whole village had been taking a keen interest in the "Parisian," the consumptive who was going to live—or die—at the Cayrol's house. They knew the doctor was keeping a room for him, all refurnished from top to bottom with furniture all white and shiny like the fine porcelain,—a rich man's caprice if ever there was one!

Fortunade asked:

"And when is he coming, this Monsieur Favières?"

"About Christmas. . . He is too ill still

travel. He is resting at my uncle's house in Paris. . . Oh! Fortunade, it is nearly eight o'clock. My father is out on the roads, on his bicycle. He will come back tired out."

"You mustn't feel lonely, Mademoiselle. I will stay to keep you company. Mother and the 'old man' won't be anxious about me. Besides, there's always plenty of folks at our place. . . They're keeping the Velhade* to-night."

Denise smiled.

"To roast chestnuts, eh? In that case Lionassou, from the Bourg d'Eyrein, will be coming?"

"Lionassou! Ah! Mademoiselle, you musn't believe all they say. What do I care for Lionassou?—a fellow who's as proud as Punch because he's rich and his nose isn't positively awry. The king's not his cousin, say what he chooses! But Fortunade Brandou's not going to be his wife! . . . Lionassou Galhar, of the Bourg d'Eyrein, indeed,—a fool and a miser, and to cap all, as vainglorious as a louse on a velvet coat,—saving your presence, Mademoiselle!"

A scarlet blush mantled the country girl's cheek, showing under the delicate skin and mounting to the roots of her hair. Her lips tightened and her needle went in spasmodic jerks. Denise watched her with affectionate pity.

"Poor child! you are still fretting after your Convent?"

* Velhade, i.e., veillée, a sitting-up party, a feature of the Christmas festivities in the Limousin.

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“Ah! Mademoiselle. I can tell *you* all about you and nobody else . . . Why ever did they stop my being a Sister? Mother has other children besides me. Madaloun is close on fifteen. She strong and sturdy, and such a worker! A couple of years more and she would make a famous wife for Lionassou. But for me, poor me! I'm not built for a farm-girl, and I have no heart for a husband. You know them, Mademoiselle, the sort of lads that come to our place, and the pranks they play! No niceness about them or pretty ways with a girl! Money and land and victuals are the only things our country folks care for. I can't abide such people. No, *my* idea, Mademoiselle, was to be a lay sister at Tulle, at the Ursulines', or else at the Hospital. I should have loved the life,—to pray and work, speak softly and nurse the sick, seeing I had not education enough to teach school. The poor patients would bless me and say how good I was, and oh! how happy that would make me! How lovely it would have been! Why can parents never understand their children's notions? They will have it I must marry. Monsieur le Docteur even laughs at me, and will keep saying: 'You don't know your true vocation, my girl. You haven't the spirit to be a woman. Get a husband, I say; you will be twice as pretty, and twice as well in health.' Oh, dear! the Lord looks at the heart and not at the face. And besides——”

She blushed furiously, startled at her own audacity, but the risky sentence was already at her tongue's end:

"You, Mademoiselle Denise, nobody finds fault with you, and yet you have never married."

The two girls fell silent,—a silence broken presently by the slow, clear notes of the church bell. Fortunade crossed herself and muttered an *Ave* in a subdued voice. Mademoiselle Cayrol went on sewing, her head bowed over her work.

She remarked at last :

"But no, it is not the same thing. Each of us has different duties to perform. Who would look after my father and make him comfortable, if I left the house? My life's work is by his side. I am not without my use in the world."

"Yes, you love your father better than a husband and children," replied Fortunade. "I wanted to love Our Lord; He is more than a father, for is He not the Saviour of the world? . . . And they say you do well, and I do ill! Forgive me, Mademoiselle Denise; I like you so much I am not afraid to speak openly to you. I know there is no one like you at Monadouze; you are cleverer and better and kinder than any of them. But how can that be when you don't go to church and don't pray to the dear God? Monsieur le Curé himself respects you. He said one day to the Baronne de Saint-Dumine: 'True, Mademoiselle Cayrol does not go to Mass; but she was brought up by the nuns. Her poor mother was a very pious woman, and for all the doctor and the bad books she reads, Mademoiselle Denise has a Christian heart.'"

"Monsieur le Curé is very good," replied Denise in a firm, quiet voice, "but let us say no more about

it, Fortunade. I cannot explain things which would only disturb your mind to no purpose; you would not understand what I meant. But I—I understand very well what you mean.”

“You are not angry, Mademoiselle?”

“No, child, no, not at all.”

The raindrops beat on the windows, the stove roared and the lamp hissed softly as it burned,—while over all could be heard the deep, melancholy voice of the waterfalls in the gorge.

Fortunade sat dreaming, dreaming of the Convent at Tulle, the lindens of the Convent garden, the class-rooms crowded with little peasant girls in blue, the chapel, with its paintings and carvings, where Jesus, in a purple robe, offers his naked, bleeding heart to the love of his virgin worshippers; dreaming of a hospital in some unknown town, a palace of pain and pity and self-sacrifice, of the agonies of death and the joys of convalescence. But Mademoiselle Cayrol’s dreams clung close to the domestic hearth, the village where she lived, this insignificant fragment of the great world that yet embraced in miniature all the passions and all the sufferings to which mankind is liable; they dwelt upon family memories and associations, the furniture and the very walls of her home; they turned to her aging father, to all that constituted her daily round of duty, to the surest and safest realities of everyday life.

A bicycle bell tinkled on the road outside. Denise started.

“At last,” she exclaimed; “here is my father at last!”

The maid-servant Françoquette had already run out to open the iron gate of the garden. She was shouting to the little boy-of-all-work :

"Jeantou, Jeantou, you scamp! come and take Monsieur's bicycle!"

Then Cayrol himself came in, tossed his waterproof cape and his dripping cap on a chair, and kissed his daughter's forehead with a hearty :

"Good-evening, Nise."

The girl's heart swelled and her eyes shone with pleasure as she cried eagerly:

"Father, I was anxious about you. It isn't wise of you to come back so late."

"I missed the train, so I came back as I went, on my bicycle. But I saw all our people. The workmen will be here to-morrow. The furniture is sent off to the station. Our boarder will find we have a delightful room ready for him."

"At this season of the year, at this time of night! Father, you only think of other people's health! Why, your moustache is all wet. Take that armchair, there, by the fire; you must be dying of hunger. To think of riding all the way back from Tulle! Oh! I am angry with you. Fortunade, tell Françoquette to dish up the soup, quick! I'll lay the table."

"Denise, darling!"

The doctor sat down and held out his hands to the warmth. The lamp showed his features in profile. He had the face of an old Gaulish chieftain, fresh-coloured cheeks, reddened and roughened over the cheek-bones, grey hair, prominent blue eyes, an

aquiline nose, a firm, square chin under a faded moustache. As he bent his head, the powerful muscles of the neck showed up and the peculiar shape of the skull, which fell in a vertical straight line behind from occiput to nape, a characteristic of the inhabitants of the Central Plateau of France. The shoulders were square and the trunk thick-set; the legs were slightly bowed and the feet planted on the ground solidly, not to say ponderously. Etienne Cayrol's whole appearance, without elegance but not without nobility, revealed his peasant ancestry; it expressed strength, a slow, steadfast, deliberate strength, sure of itself.

By this time Denise had cleared the table and laid the cloth and was busy arranging the plates. Fortunade was folding the sheets before referred to with her usual air of dutiful resignation, while the doctor, now recovered from his fatigue, whistled a country air as he watched the two girls.

"You have done a good day's work, I can see that," he said. "Denise, your sewing maid looks a pale, tired little thing; keep an eye on her. She is thin and *peaky*, as they say hereabouts; she's as lanky as a Gothic angel. Come, Fortunade, hold yourself up, throw back your shoulders, breathe deep when you go along the roads. And at home, eat beefsteak and drink good milk, instead of stuffing your stomach with cakes of black bread. The life you lead, with your back always bent and your feet on a footwarmer, is not healthy. You are anæmic, and you are nervous. So take care."

"Still, I must work, Monsieur le Docteur."

"Work by all means, but attend to your health, and don't go dreaming too much at church. Grow up into a fine woman so as to get a husband. The lads don't like weakly girls, and they are right; the finest woman is the one can make the finest child. Denise, give the girl a bottle of Peruvian bark extract—there is as much good stuff in it as in a quart of wine. You are to drink a big wineglassful of it twice a day—d'ye understand, my girl? Now, off with you, and ask Françonnette to give you a lantern."

"Sure I will, sir! I wouldn't dare pass by the cemetery in the dark. Even with the lantern I'm afraid."

"Afraid of what?"

"I don't know . . . the dead!"

"They lie quiet enough, the dead. It is only the living I am afraid of for you—just now I saw that good-for-nothing rascal Martial Veydrenne prowling about under the chestnuts."

"I'm not afraid of him, sir. He comes to our house, and he has never said a bad word to me."

"And he has never shown you the colour of his money either. I hear he drinks gratis at your place?"

"No, he never has."

"His father, the *metje* of Le Chastang, and he, make a pretty pair of scoundrels."

"The younger Veydrenne is not so black as he's painted."

"H'm! ask the keeper at the château!"

"Nobody will give him work, and so he goes poaching. Folk hate him, and that makes him mad. Perhaps, if they were kinder to him——"

"Don't you believe it! Veydrenne is notorious.

All kinds of game are good for him, including the two-legged sort that wears petticoats."

The doctor turned to his daughter.

"The Président du Tribunal was saying to me only the other day : ' It is really incredible that in our enlightened days a brute like Veydrenne, a veritable savage, is able to terrorize honest folks and keep just outside the clutch of the law. But the honest folks are fearful fowl, and dread to incur the ill-will of the malefactors : when they are called upon to give evidence in a case, they have never seen anything, heard anything ! ' And then there is the other Veydrenne, the father, who ' forges ' the sick,* and casts spells upon good Christian folk. Alas ! alas ! for human folly."

Fortunade's face wore a blank look of indifference and obstinacy and she made no reply.

" Well, well ! " continued Cayrol, " Jeantou shall go with you as far as the post. Don't forget the Peruvian bark."

" Thank you, and good-bye, Monsieur le Docteur. Am I to come back again to-morrow, Made-moiselle ? "

" Yes ; Monsieur Favières will soon be coming. We shall be very busy. I am bent on finishing all this mending."

Fortunade went her way, while Cayrol shook his head, muttering the word " Paubra ! "†

Suchlike patois words rose spontaneously to the

* The patient is laid on an anvil, between four wax tapers, and the blacksmith-magician beats with his hammer on either side of him.

† Poor creature.

doctor's lips whenever he was thinking of the country people and country things. Born of farmer folk, he was still a son of the soil, and his speech and manner retained a certain rustic frankness. There were two men in him—the man of thought and action, eager after all new ideas and looking upon himself as an educator, the man who had attended the lectures of Pierre Lafitte at the Collège de France, who had a bust of Comte in his study and who, buried though he was in the wilds of the Corrèze, was interested in all the vast scientific and social activity of his day; and then the man of private life, simple-minded, even a trifle common in some of his tastes, careful of pence and lavish of pounds, chock-full of the peasant's distrustfulness, quick to anger, a great eater, a great drinker and a keen sportsman, a lover of heavy boots, stout coats and short pipes.

Yet this possessor of some of the finest qualities a man can have, this representative of a good old French stock, bore within himself the sufficient cause of his own failures,—an extraordinary faculty of self-deception which sometimes destroyed all sense of the real proportions of things. The “ideologue” (to use Napoleon's word) in him neutralized the admirable energy of the practical man by giving him a false conception of the worth of men, the compass of doctrines, the consequences of such or such a line of action. His anxiety to be *logical* had led Cayrol into many awkward situations, and he had fatally offended the susceptibilities of the worthy bourgeois who formed the bulk of his patients in the small town where he had practised. After many

disappointments he had taken refuge in the country, without the least feeling of chagrin, being fully persuaded that everything was for the best,—and the result had justified the step; Cayrol's peasant origin made him quick to understand and manage the country folk, while the impossibility of arguing with people who were practically deaf and dumb in their terror of committing themselves necessarily restricted him to simple matters of fact and debarred him from the whims and fancies of abstract theory. It may be, on one or two occasions, he had shown a want of adaptability and even ordinary tact in his persecution of the bone-setters. But he had had the last word. His position was now a strong one; his moral influence was increasing; even the Curé had concluded a sort of "concordat" with him. Common sense was in the ascendant over that dangerous commodity, abstract logic.

Cayrol had had one great vexation to endure,—the failure of the Sanatorium scheme. Still, he made the best of it, having the comfort of his daughter's incomparably tender affection.

Denise was the one object of Cayrol's love, the pride of his life, the masterpiece of his genius. In her he found the supreme gentleness, reserve and refinement of the Lapeyries, united with the tall stature and physical vigour of the Cayrols. That this daughter of his, this paragon, should have been subjected to the discipline of a Convent, that religious mysticism should for a short space have seduced and disturbed her mind, and this by the fault of her father, weakly complaisant to the caprices of a chronic invalid,—

this was a constant source of remorse to Cayrol. "I have not been logical," he told himself. His wife dead, he had reclaimed, peremptorily and passionately, the young girl's soul; he had destroyed her faith in Christianity root and branch, and believed he had uprooted at the same time all useless metaphysical questionings. The crisis thus provoked might have been dangerous. It lasted two years and wore itself out without any great harm being done. Denise ceased to believe, but she found it pleasant to have believed. Her reason was set free of the trammels of dogma, but her sensibility remained such as her bringing-up had made it, and the Curé of Monadouze was justified in saying that Mademoiselle Cayrol still kept a Christian heart.

Denise was not very highly educated. Books of Science and Philosophy often wearied her, while no novel was ever seen within the walls of the doctor's library. Of contemporary art and poetry father and daughter knew next to nothing. They knew no beauty save that of nature. Mademoiselle was clever at all sorts of woman's work and managed the household judiciously, though she never talked about washing clothes or making preserves to the ladies from Tulle who came to see her.

These ladies thought her a homely little person, and rather looked down upon her because she had never been to Paris and did not read the magazines or play the piano.

She was known to have no money, and no suitor had yet asked her hand in marriage.

CHAPTER II

STRETCHED full length on the seat among his cushions and rugs, Jean Favières lay tossing and groaning, feeling more and more feverish as night fell. Tired out, he had thrown back his head upon the pillow, showing the soft, velvety eyes, beautiful still, though dulled with suffering, the unnaturally heavy eyelashes, the melancholy mouth that tries to smile. A hectic flush burns on the cheeks, but the brow, the straight nose with the delicately cut nostrils, the beardless chin, the thin neck, have the waxy, transparent look that betrays an organism exhausted by disease. The dark hair—that breaks under the comb every morning—is wet with the moisture that beads the temples, while the young man's hand hangs feeble and listless, as if life itself were slipping away from the relaxed fingers.

All day long the plains of France have been speeding past his eyes. It is hours since the sunset purple faded from off the hills of the Vézère; hours since the little lamp was lit that winks from the roof of the railway-carriage behind the half-drawn blue curtain. The rumble of the train grows louder as the darkness deepens. Now it shapes itself into

a sentence, in a heavy, rhythmical, rapid monotonous a meaningless sentence that yet, by dint of endless repetition, fills the ears and preoccupies the attention of the sick man. He looks desperately about him in search of some distraction. Faint lights and heavy shadows are fighting for the mastery. The parcels in the rack loom enormous through the gloom . . . They are shifting—they are going to fall! There is a sleeping figure opposite, lolling against the whitey-grey cushions—a man wearing an English travelling-cap and holding an open newspaper across his knees . . . The flickering shadows play queer pranks with his face, exaggerating the deep hollow of the eye-sockets and deforming the nose till it looks like an animal's snout, twisting the features into a hideous grimace . . . Jean does not know his godfather. His eyes are dazed and see only a spectral army of shadows ready to assault and attack and engulf him. If he shuts them, the voice begins again, in the same doleful, cadenced whisper, repeating, repeating, inside his head, its incomprehensible terrifying message.

Now he sinks into the red darkness of a feverish dream through which flash pictures, images, fragments of yore and yesterday. The cinematograph of memory works at random, its films all disordered, disturbed, inconsequent. A crony pops up, laughing and careless, and tells a string of shooting and motoring stories. Then a German doctor, a Swiss doctor . . . snow mountains . . . and a woman with coal-black hair and naked arms. Coaxing and cajoling, she calls him by his name

"Jean, dear boy, Jean," she begins . . . and he hates her . . . she *will* come again and again . . . he hates her even in his delirium.

Tulle. The train stops. M. Lapeyrie awakes with a start:

"Have I been asleep?"

"Yes, for a bit."

"You called me?"

"Only this moment. Will you uncover the lamp?"

"There. You look very pale, my lad. What a trying journey! But we are nearly there. Yes, I shall be glad to know you are safe at Monadouze, among good, kind people who will look well after you and get to love you directly. You will do what they tell you, won't you?"

"I promise, if they don't worry me too much!" this in a peevish tone. "Send me where you please, to Monadouze or Landerneau, or anywhere except to a sanatorium, and I will put up with anything."

"You will be obedient, because you want to get well, to go on with your studies. Keep up your spirits, good Lord! Never say die! Make up your mind to live."

"You want to influence my mind, I can see that. Well, if it gives you any pleasure, I will say what you wish—I want to live. And I have a hundred reasons for saying so; life has been so kind to me! My mother worships me, now doesn't she? My stepfather dotes on me; my friends cannot get over the want of me, and my mistress, like a true sister of charity——"

"Why this irony, which pains me and does you no good?"

"Forgive me, I am hurting your feelings; I am an ungrateful beast, I know I am. Yet you are the only human being who loves me, and the only one I love. But I have had no luck since my father's death and my mother married again. I have lost everything—gone bankrupt of everything—friends, relations, love and health. Then little things, mere trifles, often exasperate me. Hubertin's visit the other day, that ruffian who would talk of nothing but his motor and his yacht and his powers of endurance! To think of anybody being so tactless! And then, all of a sudden—it was ludicrous—he remembered where he was, and he dropped his voice and put on a broken-hearted look of commiseration!"

"What of that?"

"Oh! of course, I don't really care, but it gets on my nerves, you know."

"You are talking too much. Calm yourself."

"I am calm enough. You heard how I received Juliette, when she paid me the delicate attention of coming to say good-bye. 'You were afraid of infection, dear girl? You are leaving me *for the sake of my health*. Well, that is only natural! I bear you no grudge. A consumptive is hardly a man at all, and cannot play the lover. I should have left you, never fear, if you had been in the same case. Well, then, good-bye! Tell my successor to look well after his health.' I reeled it all off in so composed a tone she went away without a

suspicion how deeply she had wounded me. No doubt she told Hubertin: 'What a fool I was to worry my head about Favières. The fellow has no heart at all! it's just sickening!'

"That business haunts you; you cannot help harking back to the incident. If I had been at home yesterday I should have ordered them to refuse the door to your Mademoiselle Rémond. Forget the girl."

"Oh! that is easy enough. I shall have no temptation to mention her at Monadouze. With an old man and an old maid and no one else to talk to, my thoughts should be chaste, surely."

"My niece is not precisely an old maid. I have not seen her for ten years. She was not pretty, but very sweet and charming."

"I should hate it if she *were* pretty. Plain women are forced to be good-natured—to make us forgive their ill looks. There, I know I shall adore Mademoiselle Cayrol,—a sort of ripe, middle-aged passion for a good cousin who knits socks and makes preserves. That's the only sort of woman I want to fascinate now—someone to spoil and pet me."

"What a child you are still!" cried M. Lapeyrie, smiling in spite of himself.

"I mean to fascinate Monsieur Cayrol and Mademoiselle de Cayrol and the whole house of Cayrol. A year from now—perhaps a few months from now—they will be saying: 'Yes, he was a charming young man, that Jean Favières. It was a real pleasure to have known him though it did

not last long, certainly. He was far gone in the disease; yes, a typical case.' But I am paining you again, my poor good guardian?"

"Yes, you are, badly."

"Pooh! I am joking. I don't mean to die in a hurry; you know I don't think anything of the kind! If I did, I should have stopped in Paris; I would as lief be buried there as anywhere. No, no, to die at my age, that would be too absurd! and my step-father would be too delighted."

There was a whistle, and the train slackened speed. The brakes shrieked and the wheels skidded along the rails; then one by one the lights of the little station loomed red through the fog. Then a sharp stoppage, and the swaying gleam of a lantern as an official ran past the carriage windows:

"Monadouze! Monadouza!"

"You stay where you are," M. Lapeyrie told his godson. "The doctor will be there, no doubt."

He opened the door. Out on the platform, in the fog and darkness, people were asking questions and looking for friends, elbowed by the railway employés. M. Lapeyrie saw once more the broad-brimmed felts, the all-round whiskers, the drooping, long-pointed shirt-collars, the cloaks of heavy frieze, the *palholes* (straw capes) knotted with velvet; he heard the familiar patois with its dragging, sing-song vowels, that irresistibly called up a vision of bygone days. It was his "ain countree," his fatherland!

The fog hung heavy and the clammy soil balled under the boot-sole. A soldier on furlough was

kissing the "old folks," while an ancient crone, hampered by an enormous umbrella and a basket, stood craning her neck and staring her eyes out, like a frightened hen, looking out for the expected son or daughter.

M. Lapeyrie was soon on the platform and asking for Doctor Cayrol. A black cloak detached itself from the crowd of black cloaks, and a clear voice called :

"Uncle Albert !"

"Denise !"

Hooded and buried in a vast cloak, like a cloth sentry-box, Mademoiselle Cayrol advanced to meet her uncle, making hurried apologies for her father's absence. He was with a keeper who had been attacked by poachers in the chestnut woods of Eyguières. But with his good bicycle he would be back in no time. They would find him at home.

"We are so glad to see you, uncle," and then abruptly: "How is Monsieur Favières? fairly well? I was anxious about him. Uncle, will you look after the luggage? Our servant boy will take Monsieur Favières' trunk in the *carretou* (light cart). We have a closed carriage, the carriage from the Château. Uncle, help Monsieur Favières to get down."

"I can get down by myself, Mademoiselle." Jean spoke stiffly, with the wounded vanity of a man who will not confess himself weak and physically helpless before a woman.

Denise looked at him where he stood on the slippery step. His cloth cap, of a dark speckled grey,

only half hid the straggling wisps of his brown hair. Beardless and startlingly pale, his fine eyes languid with fatigue, he looked a mere boy, so much so that at the sight Denise had a feeling of compassionate surprise mingled with a certain relief. Naturally timid, she had rather dreaded the coming of an unknown stranger; but he was little more than a child.

"I am the bearer of my father's apologies," she began, "and his welcome to you. Oh! take care!"

Jean was hesitating, almost losing his footing; involuntarily Denise put out her hand, her bare hand, and the young man's fell obediently into the strong, soft palm for support.

He began to stammer excuses.

"No, don't talk, Monsieur; the night air is damp. Pull up your coat-collar. Put your handkerchief over your mouth. Now, Uncle Albert, we will follow you."

Jean submitted to her guidance, rather overawed by Mademoiselle's Cayrol's tone of authority, her height and masculine exterior. The cowled cloak, which reminded him of the dress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, allowed nothing of the woman to appear. Settled comfortably in the carriage, Jean ventured on a word or two of politeness, but was instantly checked.

The train was getting under way again. There was a prolonged whistle, and the tail-lights grew fainter and fainter in the distance and finally vanished, swallowed up in the black depths of a tunnel. Round the carriage the passengers who

had arrived from Brive, Saint-Hilaire and Cornil for the Christmas Mass and the Christmas-eve supper and family reunion began to disperse by twos and threes with their swaying lanterns.

Denise, bending over Jean, was settling the pillow, arranging the goat-skin rug over his knees, feeling if the foot-warmer was still warm. All her movements were sedate, precise, business-like. A reassuring sense of security seemed to emanate from her, which dominated Jean in spite of himself. Denise had said: "Do not talk!" He protested internally, but held his peace.

"Come, come!" he thought to himself, "is she going to treat me like a schoolboy all the time? 'Do this. Don't do that,' and I am never to answer! No, I cannot stand that. And then, that horrid hood!"

Half rebellious, half subjugated, he yielded to the irresistible curiosity a man must feel wherever a woman is concerned, and tried to catch a glimpse of the face concealed under "that horrid hood." But after shutting the carriage-door, Denise stood waiting quietly outside, while passing peasants threw her a greeting.

"Ah! good-evening, Mademoiselle Cayrol!"

To which she would answer cordially:

"Good-night, Chadebech! Good-night, Jacquille."

Jean was surprised at the fine quality of the voice which, with its Limousin accent, dragged a little, not unpleasingly, on the final syllables. He was extraordinarily sensitive to the charm of the human voice, that subtle instrument of telepathy.

"Madame de Warrens," he thought, "must have had just such a silvery organ." Denise Cayrol's voice was a clear runlet of molten silver, a gush of cool spring-water between the rocks in the burning heat of summer.

Once or twice Denise came closer to the window to ask :

"Monsieur Favières, are you getting tired? The fact is, my uncle has got into an argument with the station-master about a trunk that has been left behind at Tulle, it seems. I can hear him from here working himself into a passion. H'sh! don't answer; that's forbidden!"

Her hand was playing with the clasp of her hood, looking very white against the dark stuff. Eyes and teeth gleamed in the darkness, and the mere inflexion of her voice told Jean that she was smiling.

CHAPTER III

THE horse trotted on up the stony ascent in the wet darkness, while the twofold ray of the carriage lamps revealed at intervals a corner of wall, a sloping roof of thatch, a clump of hollow, storm-twisted chestnuts.

Denise Cayrol was the only one to speak.

"That is the Touzac road, to the left. The crossroads of the Great Elm. Can you hear the waterfalls, Monsieur Favières?"

When her voice ceased, her silence made the night seem darker than ever.

Then the carriage stopped. Jean, as if in a dream, went up four steps, crossed a piece of garden and saw a flagged hall and, beyond, a staircase with a massive balustrade of dark wood. Presently, when relieved of his cloak, he found himself in a warm, well-lighted room, in which the table was laid for dinner. A man in velveteens and leggings like a sportsman was shaking his hand. An old woman with a wrinkled face and wearing a straw hat on top of a white cap, was calling out for Jeantou. A thin, dark-complexioned girl was slipping out at another door. Dazzled and confused, Jean Favières dropped into an armchair.

"Hullo, there!" cried the doctor, "don't make such a noise, and shut the door."

Then, turning to Jean Favières :

"You are tired, Monsieur. Your room is ready for you. It is not very large, but it is bright enough. Are you hungry?"

"No, doctor. I dined at the Brive refreshment-room. I *am* tired; but when all's said and done, I can stand a good deal and I have borne the journey capitally."

"Better than I expected!" said Cayrol.

His rough, good-natured ways delighted Jean.

"A good sort, I can see; no posing and coming the grand doctor about him!" thought the young man, much relieved. "Not an eagle, perhaps, but a fine fellow for all that."

"I don't want to ask you any questions to-night or make any examination. For to-night I am your host, not your medical adviser. Oh! we shall get on perfectly well together, you'll find."

"I feel sure we shall," Jean replied. "Your welcome is of the kindest, Monsieur, and I thank you for it. I should have liked to thank your daughter, but she ordered me not to speak, so I held my tongue. I am quite amenable, you see, and don't deserve my reputation."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, my godfather has told you in his letters I was past bearing. Don't deny it; he has owned as much to me."

Cayrol burst out laughing.

"You—you past bearing? I don't believe a word

of it. You are too sensible not to obey orders."

"Yes; sensible orders."

"And kind ones. Lepeyrie, where are you? Lapeyrie, come here a moment, I want you. Denise will look after the trunks when they come. Denise," (raising his voice) "go to the kitchen and ask them for a glass of hot milk. There, you see, Lapeyrie, your godson and I have made each other's acquaintance; we are friends already."

"You have tamed Jean right off? I congratulate you!"

"Don't make me out worse than I am," cried the young man, "I am just overjoyed to be out of a sanatorium!"

"Here you will be one of the family, my good sir. You will find it dull, I daresay; we are old-fashioned folks, quite provincial and behind the age. But you will enjoy quiet—quiet of body and mind, pure air, a fine country, though not on the vast scale of Davos or Leysin."

Lapeyrie asked:

"Where have you put him?"

"In the first-floor room, the middle one, you know, between Denise's and mine. I have had the walls enamelled white. The floor is laid with linoleum. Linen curtains, panes pierced for ventilation. Oh! we shall observe all the special rules of hygiene, never fear!"

"Then you don't look upon me as dangerous, doctor?"

"Dangerous—why dangerous?"

"Because of infection."

"Should I have you here if I did? No, no, our precautions are duly taken, and you have received the needful education at the Sanatorium."

"I am most particular and careful."

"You are quite right. You do your duty; we will do ours, and all will go well. Denise, Denise, when is that glass of milk coming?"

"Here it is."

Jean looked round and saw Denise at the door, carrying a glass on a plate; he saw her at last, without the disfiguring hooded cloak, tall and fair in her ripe young womanhood. He saw her rosy cheeks and golden head, her eyes sparkling and her hair catching the light. How like the doctor she was! Both were specimens of a puissant race, rejuvenated by infusion of good peasant blood; both had the serenity, the calm, of vigorous organisations.

Jean was not hungry, but he accepted with a good grace the warm milk offered him.

"Now come with me," said Cayrol. "I will show you the way."

Jean bowed.

"Good-night, Mademoiselle. I don't know how to thank you. You terrorized me so at the station!"

"I did?"

She smiled as she spoke, and this made Jean smile. Then, without a trace of embarrassment, she gave him her hand, the firm, soft, cool hand he had touched once before, to lean on it for support.

"Sleep well, Monsieur. Don't be surprised to

hear the bells; they ring at nine and again at midnight."

Cayrol and Jean quitted the room, leaving M. Lapeyrie alone with his niece.

"Well," the former began interrogatively, "what do you think of my godson?"

"I have hardly seen him yet."

"You don't dislike the look of him?"

"By no means; he seems very pleasant. But he is very ill; I never dreamt he was so ill."

"It frightens you?"

"Oh, no! but it grieves me. How old is he?"

"Twenty-three. He was unable to complete his military service, and for the last two years he has been dragging about from Switzerland to the Riviera."

"His mother does not love him then?"

"Not as she should. She has a second son, a splendid youngster, who absorbs all her powers of loving. And his step-father loathes Jean, who hates him back heartily."

The doctor came back into the room.

"Your godson has gone to bed, Lapeyrie. I think he is very feverish."

"Have you any hope?"

"I don't want to tire him; I shall examine him to-morrow. Seeing him for the first time—well, he is touched, no doubt of that!"

"He is not dead yet, Cayrol, I assure you. The progress of the disease is very slow, and that gives ground for hope. The doctors condemned him last year, and he is still alive."

"Yes, there are periods of arrest in the development of tuberculosis, truces as it were. In fact, unless he has come to us too late, we shall hope to cure him."

"Out with it! you think he *has* come too late?"

"Possibly."

Françounette, still wearing her *palhole*, brought in the soup-tureen.

"We must dine, anyway," observed Cayrol.

All three sat down to table, Albert Lapeyrie declaring:

"I am making a second dinner. The soup smells so good it makes me hungry again. Ah! but they can cook in the Limousin!"

His brother-in-law questioned him about his business affairs and gave him the history of the Sanatorium. M. Lapeyrie tried his best not to cast a gloom on this family reunion, but his thoughts *would* revert constantly to Jean.

"And the ex-Madame Favières, the fair Arlésienne, your old flame?" asked the doctor. "Does she realise her son's danger?"

"No. I was just saying so to your daughter when you came in. Your ex-Madame Favières, my old fancy, let us say, is younger than ever and as handsome as ever. But she has no heart to make her remember. Jean has felt her coldness deeply, very deeply. But there, he has got used to it. His mother counts for so little in his life."

"You have adopted him?"

"Pretty well. I felt a passionate and quite disin-

terested admiration for his mother, and the deepest respect for his father. Poor Louis Favières ! How well he bore grief and pain, and how gallantly he faced death ! And then, what charm, what intellectual acuteness ! I can never forget him."

"You never wanted to marry Madame Favières ?"

"Oh, yes, I did ; I own I did. She was extremely attractive. And then, I loved the little lad. But a millionaire came on the scene."

"And Madame Favières chose him."

Lapeyrie heaved a sigh :

"Jean has never really had a home. As a boarder at the Lycée he used to spend half his holidays at my house, and he had a peculiarly tender, sensitive temperament, an infinite craving for affection. I will tell you about it presently. . . But there, I can speak out before my niece ; she is no longer a little girl."

"No, indeed," put in Denise, "she is an old maid."

"Nonsense ! you wrong yourself."

"Uncle Albert, I am twenty-seven."

"Well, then, I will tell you, both of you : Jean has been badly hit, hurt in the tenderest place, and the blow has changed his character for the worse. He had formed a liaison with a minor actress, a mighty pretty girl, upon my word ! who seemed to worship the ground he trod on. But when he fell ill, and when it was no longer possible to doubt the true nature of his complaint, Mademoiselle Juliette was scared at the idea of infection and, under pretence of

sparing her lover's health, left him abruptly."

"I am not at all surprised at that," said Cayrol. "The alert given by thousands of modern books and newspapers has destroyed the old romantic, sentimental conception of the 'interesting consumptive.' He has lost his saintship, the pale young man of the story-books. Women nowadays see in him just a sick man, neither more nor less attractive than any other sick man, not a bit more fascinating, and a good deal more dangerous."

"Oh! father," protested Denise eagerly, "you don't approve of that creature's behaviour! To forsake the man you love, because you are afraid of the risk, is very vile, very shameful."

"No, no, my girl, it is not shameful at all. Monsieur Favières had not taken the young lady as a sick-nurse, had he? Nor had he married her, to share his fortunes with her, whether chances of happiness or risks of *misfortune*. What has he to complain of then? Yes, your Mademoiselle Juliette has my approval—my approval, not my esteem."

M. Lapeyrie was scandalized.

"Oh! Cayrol!" he exclaimed.

"What now? I shock you because I don't cry over your godson's love disappointments? But even with a married couple I should blame the wife who allowed conjugal familiarities with a degenerate. Let her nurse him, yes, and never forsake him, but refuse him her favours. That is her plain duty. *A fortiori*, when it is merely a mistress in the case, simply a temporary liaison, I can understand the rupture, and I approve of it."

"You approve of such cruelty, such cowardice?"

"Cruelty? but why? Monsieur Jean Favières, would he have kept a mistress who was consumptive? Not he. He would have been cruel, without any remorse. Cowardice? Tell me, which of the two is the bigger coward, the lover who warns his mistress he is ill and tells her to keep her distance or the one who presumes to inflict on another person the spectacle of his sufferings, all the toils and fatigues and risks of a long illness? No, Lapeyrie, you will never convince me otherwise. Love and marriage between a healthy subject and a hopelessly diseased one are abominable. When a woman gives herself to a confirmed drunkard or a syphilitic or a consumptive, when in these circumstances she imperils chances of healthy motherhood, she commits a twofold crime, a crime against herself and a crime against the race. And that is the sin the churches refuse to recognise and leave unpunished, a sin that outlives its perpetrators and which their children's children expiate to the fourth generation!"

Cayrol's face was red as fire and his fist thumped the table.

"And there are actually parents ready to tie their daughters to suchlike 'wrecks of humanity!' and girls who will consent to marriages of the kind out of compassion!"

"Say out of ignorance, father. I, too, am full of compassion for these unfortunates, but pity would never induce me to marry one of them, thank God! I should be too miserably unhappy if I had weakly

or deformed children. Think of the remorse, the agony of mind ! ”

“ Hear the voice of reason, reason and sound sense ! ” cried Cayrol, enchanted. “ Listen to your niece, Lapeyrie. We always think alike, she and I. We are none of your romantic, over-refined, morbid-minded sort. ”

“ Nevertheless, Denise, you were indignant with Jean’s sweetheart ? ”

“ I own it. But as they did not marry, I suppose they were not much in love. Therefore—— ”

The ingenuousness of the remark disarmed M. Lapeyrie.

“ Yes, I suppose—I suppose they were not very much in love with each other . . . The discussion is closed. ”

But the doctor stuck to his point.

“ Do you know the reason, Lapeyrie, why so many women, and some of the best women, attach themselves to weaklings, incapables physically and morally ? Do you know why they prefer the weak whom they protect before the strong who would protect them ? ”

“ Out of a divine instinct of maternity ? out of a refined sentimentality ? ”

“ Because they are badly brought up, every one of them, poisoned by bad literature and unhealthy mysticism ; because they are ignorant of the laws governing the sexual relations, a knowledge of which would rectify the false and ridiculous ideas they entertain about what people call love. Religious women especially. Look you, I have an

distance here, under my hand ; you saw that little dark, thin, pale-faced girl who was laying the cloth when you first arrived? ”

“ Yes, I noticed her ; she slipped out of the room like a flash.”

“ She is the innkeeper’s daughter at Monadouze, a child of nineteen, neuropathic, anæmic and impressionable to the last degree. She was brought up at a Convent and it has quite spoilt her. She broods over the ‘ adorable wounds,’ she goes over in her mind the Stations of the Cross, and washes in the blood of the Saviour. Pain and grief have a fascination for her. She finds a secret satisfaction in taking other people’s miseries on her own shoulders, and would be quite capable, poor devil ! of marrying a leper to console him for his wretchedness. When a girl, at the difficult age of puberty, passes hours every day in meditation before a dying Christ on the crucifix, she is fatally destroying her mental balance, and her highest ideal of love becomes inevitably associated with mere images of suffering and death. That is how it is with Fortunade Brandou.”

“ But Denise was reared at a Convent. Denise has been religious ! Denise has had her ecstasies before the crucifix.”

“ Denise has had an antidote ; I have re-fashioned her education ; I have made her face realities, the plain realities of life and nature.”

“ Well, so much the better, if she is happier so. But surely, Cayrol, if you suppress the charitable instinct in women, the instinct of benevolence and

self-sacrifice, you will not augment the sum total of human happiness. Man's infinite selfishness is counterbalanced by woman's infinite capacity for pity."

"I am not for suppressing self-devotion, but enlightening it. Moreover, I extend its province to beings yet unborn; to sacrifice a physical craving, a sentimental dream, to the perfection of the race, is not this a legitimate form of feminine heroism?"

"Man, all you see in love is the child."

"Yes, the child, nothing else; all the rest is only talk—or filth!" declared the doctor bluntly.

M. Lapeyrie shook his head. He remembered how Doctor Cayrol, good husband and excellent father as he was, had never felt the touch of passion. His early manhood had been chaste and his old age was unsullied. Like all great workers and great saints, he had found sufficient scope in an extreme cerebral activity for all the unemployed forces of his organism. He used to say, and allege his own case to prove it, that a man of robust constitution can grow old in dignity and continence, living in his memories of the past, if he consumes his energy in doing good and avoids voluptuous suggestions.

He would have nothing to say to love without duties and rights, and stoutly defended marriage and family life on every occasion. The rhapsodies of the romantic school exasperated him. Yet he appreciated, in his own way, the poetry of love. The physiological functions, condemned by the poets, seemed in his eyes both noble and beautiful, like all the great forces of nature, like the ever-

repeated dawn of day, like the ever-repeated flux and reflux of the tides. A virgin's adolescence, the mystery of the pregnant womb, the swelling of a shapely bosom full of milk, the first cry of the newborn babe and the first smile of the young mother—all the physical drama of a woman's life stirred in Cayrol emotions of awe and tenderness. He would speak of such things before his daughter with a chaste freedom ; and Denise, who had learned to despise mock modesty, heard him without a trace of embarrassment.

M. Lapeyrie looked at his niece. Her elbow rested on the table, her chin was in her hand, and her look fixed on Cayrol ; as she sat so, the full light of the lamp fell on her tawny coronal of hair. Her mouth, with its full, scarlet lips, expressed a gentle mildness, and her eyes gleamed with a serene light.

"What does *she* know of love?" thought M. Lapeyrie. "Has she ever had a suspicion, a thought of it, a wish for it? Does she regret the want of it? Has she given up hoping for it? Not a doubt, she is a true Cayrol—no imagination, no sensibility. Poor girl!"

CHAPTER IV

AFTER dinner Mademoiselle announced that she was going out.
“At this time of night?”

“I promised to attend the midnight Mass with Fortunade and Jeantou; but as you are here, uncle, I will content myself with going as far as the inn to see the *velhade* and bring back some new-made *gogues* * with me.”

“New-made *gogues*!” exclaimed M. Lapeyrie; “why, that reminds me of the Christmas-times when I was a boy. Denise, if I am not asking too much, take me too; we will see the *velhade* and go to the midnight Mass. I shall like it amazingly.”

“So shall I, uncle.”

“You will come, Cayrol?”

“A thousand thanks!” laughed the doctor, who was smoking his pipe, his feet resting against the door of the stove. “I was called up last night to see a patient; I want to sleep my fill to-night. Besides, our boarder cannot be left alone. The nurse I have engaged from the hospital at Tulle will not arrive till to-morrow evening.”

“Besides which, you are a perfect heathen, and

* Puddings made for Christmas in the Limousin.

you don't like churches."

"I neither like nor dislike them; they bore me, that's all. *My* church is the hospital!"

"And Denise?"

"Denise is at liberty to go where she pleases. Our Curé's sermons amuse her, and it is a diversion for her to watch the congregation. It is a very innocent distraction, I assure you."

"You are tolerant."

"Intercourse with the 'reds' of a provincial town has disgusted me with a certain sort of acrid anti-clericalism. I even defended our Curé at Monalouze against the attacks of a little local paper,—and got myself styled 'Jesuit' for my pains."

"And the name hurts?"

"I can afford to laugh at it. Let me tell you this: I may reject the Catholic faith and fight against clerical bigotry without renouncing my right to respect a Priest as an honest man. You will meet our Curé, the Abbé Barbazan,—the best of good fellows, patriot and democrat without knowing it, a man who understands the peasant because he is a peasant himself—poor, straightforward and rough-spoken, a true Limousin. He never comes to my house, nor I to his, because of the mischief-makers; it might compromise him. We meet at the bedside of our patients, and we shake hands amicably."

"And what does *he* say about the girl you spoke of, the neuropathic subject?"

"The Brandou girl? Oh! he advises her to get married and have a lot of 'young rogues,' as he

calls them."

Denise was fastening the clasp of her cloak, the hood of which was now thrown back. She had put on a dark-coloured hat relieved by the flashing hues of a cock-pheasant's feathers.

"Good-night, father!"

"Good-night, Nise."

Little Jeantou, a youngster of fourteen, with a red face and eyes like a saucy mouse, was swinging his lantern in the garden. Mademoiselle Cayrol told him:

"Go on in front. We know the way."

But the child would not leave the rest of the party.

"Look, uncle, what a coward Jeantou is! He does not dare own he is frightened to go past the cemetery alone. The other evening, instead of escorting Fortunade to the post, he just left her without a word at the crossroads. And the creature goes to the government school, and boasts of his certificate! A fine scholar that! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Jeantou?"

"I'm not ashamed; I'm afraid—Fortunade was afraid too."

"Was it the White Hound or the Werewolf you saw, eh?"

The lad did not answer the question; there are names one does not care to utter in all places and at all hours.

It was an up-and-down road, which followed the natural contour of the mountain-side, and every here and there the light of the lantern afforded a

glimpse into the abysses of the gorge, in places where the roots of the chestnuts had undermined a portion of the overhanging terrace. M. Lapeyrie sniffed the keen air delightedly, enjoying its peculiar savour,—a savour the inhabitants of Monadouze never notice, and which he himself would grow insensible to by to-morrow.

"You like this country, Denise? You never get tired of it? There is nothing you regret?"

"What should I regret?"

"Oh! society, the pleasures of your time of life, friendships, a hundred things."

"I do not care for society, uncle, not a bit. Madame de Saint-Dumine invites me sometimes to her luncheons, to meet ladies from Tulle. I accept, because I do not want to annoy her; but I would rather stay at home."

"Why? These Tulle ladies are not pleasant people?"

"Oh! yes, they are, but they all know each other and talk amongst themselves about their own affairs, and that is not very interesting to me."

"There are young men too?"

"Yes."

"Well? They pay you attentions?"

"Pay me attentions, uncle! What an idea!"

"It would be quite in the order of things."

"I am very reserved, and they must think me stupid. And then, everybody knows I have no fortune and that I don't mean to marry."

"You don't *mean* to marry?"

"I am too old."

"You are young and pretty . . . Upon my word! I never thought you were so pretty."

"Don't make fun of me, please!"

"Come, you may just as well tell me the truth,—me, your old uncle. You don't wish to marry?"

"When I was younger, I was like all other girls of twenty,—I had my dreams . . . of whom? Of the Unknown Somebody. He never came. Now I am grown old, and have left off expecting him. Little by little the thought of marrying faded from my mind. I have made my happiness out of what life had to give me."

"Are you happy?"

"Yes, I assure you I am. I only regret sometimes——"

"What, tell me?"

"I should have dearly loved to have a child."

M. Lapeyrie thought to himself:

She is not one of the women made for love, but for motherhood."

Not daring to pursue the subject, he resumed that of his godson.

"I appeal to your kindness, Denise, in his behalf. The story I have told you, and which you and your father have not perhaps quite grasped, must not make you think ill of Jean. My poor godson is no profligate. He was athirst for love and affection. And as he was a fascinating fellow, the women—well, they did not run away from him. . . . Now his malady has made a sort of pariah of him. He suffers bodily, and he suffers more still in his personal pride as a young man. Whatever

you do, don't look as if you compassionated him ; pity humiliates him terribly."

" I gathered that."

" Really ? "

" Yes, at the station. He did not want to take my hand to get down out of the railway carriage. That is childish."

" Jean is very like a child in some ways. His imagination rules his feelings, and his feelings rule his reason. He is selfish and tender-hearted, enthusiastic and wrong-headed, and above all, extremely changeable. He will need all your patience."

" We are very patient, uncle. Monsieur Favières will not be unhappy with us."

They were close to the village by this time.

" I recognise the crossroads," cried M. Lapeyrie. " The cemetery is to the right ; on the left is the chapel where they lay people who have been killed in accidents, before carrying them to their homes. The old elm-tree is at the corner of the road. Lower down is the post-office and as you go up towards the railway station, stands the school-house. You see, I remember it all."

" You love our Limousin ? "

" Yes, just as one loves a faithful old nurse who is rich in fairy tales. It is a melancholy but fascinating land, another Brittany, less famous, and less vulgarized. I love its heaths and rocks, its pellucid streams, its musical patois, its very poverty. Denise, are there ' wise men ' still at Monadouze ? Are the magic springs still held in honour ? Do they take

children that are tongue-tied or dumb to St. Claquette? Do they cast spells by means of the bucket and looking-glass? Have they left off 'forging' folks who have the jaundice? The Wild Huntsman and the *Bérou* (were-wolf) have not deserted the district yet, now it is so much given up to *progress*? Do they still set up in the seed fields a cross and four bunches of straw in honour of Christ and the four Evangelists? I can never get over the blow, Denise, when I think how the Municipal Council have suppressed the procession of the Lunade and that the last of the wolves have been killed off."

Denise laughed merrily:

"Take comfort, Uncle Albert. Our good folk of the Corrège are less civilized than they appear. They hide away their superstitions, but they stick to them. The 'wise man' is my father's rival and practises almost openly. As for the wolves, there are still some to be found not so far from here. Why, we even have a brigand, the most famous poacher of the countryside, the notorious Veydrenne. He terrorizes everybody, and takes his blackmail in kind—here a bag of potatoes, there a joint of pork. Mère Brandou durst not refuse him his tobacco and powder, though he never pays a farthing. The keepers are afraid of him, and, do what he will, no countryman will run the risk of denouncing him."

"Ah! you delight me!" cried M. Lapeyrie. "They have not quite spoilt the good old country yet."

Denise interrupted his ecstasies.

“Look, do you see the lanterns? There is going to be a great gathering at the midnight Mass.”

Along the paths that skirt the flanks of the unseen mountains could be seen moving lights, appearing, disappearing, gathering in companies. Suddenly a bell rang out, then another, and yet another. For a while they kept separate and distinct, as if hesitating to join forces. They sounded all together for an instant, in a tumultuous clash and clang of broken vibrations; then the full carillon burst forth in so joyous a peal the four bronze wings that bore it seemed to flash out light, as well as noise, into the reverberating darkness.

Thus, as on every evening through December, the *venamen* was rung in all the churches of the Limousin, and from the volcanic cones of Auvergne to the chestnut forests of Périgord, from the heaths of the Creuse to the stony wastes of the Lot, the night was one clangour of bells. But on this Eve of the Nativity, the iron-tongued messengers of good tidings proclaimed louder and clearer than ever the extinguishable Christian hope. They promised the Gospel peace to men of good will, to these shepherds and ploughmen who were now assembling under guidance of the dancing lights with their wraps, their hare-skin caps, their heavy sabots and iron-shod staves. They awoke the young mother and her babe behind the flowered bed-curtains, the aged grandam dozing by the chimney-corner, and in the warm stable, beside the manger, the ass and his brother the ox. Yes, so mighty was their canticle of hope it set the void sky trembling

and the earth where the dead repose.

Denise pushed open the door of the inn. For a moment or two M. Lapeyrie could make out nothing but a compact mass of people crowded one against the other, standing as passive as so many sheep and meekly indifferent to Mère Brandou's cuffs as she hustled them about.

"Mademoiselle Cayrol! and the gentleman from Paris! *Boun Diou!* Quick, Marcellin, be quick! Set chairs."

She dashed about, her hands full of plates, a little brown, flat-faced woman, her hair plaited in little tails and twisted into a chignon under a black net; and half in French, half in patois, her quick tongue wagged apace, answering one or another customer and shouting orders to the exhausted maid-servant and the bawling lad of all work.

"Such a crowd as we have, Mademoiselle! It's enough to drive a poor body frantic a night like this! And then we killed a porker to-day, yes. You want some fresh *gogues*, eh? two pounds; is that all? Fortunade, put aside a couple of pounds of *gogues* for Mademoiselle Denise; you can call for them after the mass. Whatever do they want, bawling so upstairs? Fortunade, Fortunade, take 'em up some wine. No, I'll go myself! You see to the stove!"

The kitchen of the Brandous' inn, filled as it was with clouds of tobacco smoke fumes of hot wine and smoke from the stove where the pig's puddings were cooking, recalled those Rembrandt prints in which black is the prevailing tone, with all its shades and values. At the further end the winding wooden

aircase with its massive balustrade could be dimly discerned. A lamp swung from the joists of the ceiling, shining feebly through a yellow haze and surrounded by festoons of sleek *gogues*, joints of pork and strings of red-brown onions. The dirty walls, in which the Tsar and Tsarina faced M. Loubet, the cutlery and dishes of stained beechwood, the table crowded with bottles, the dark dresses of the women were bathed in the red glow from a fire of heath, before which an old woman crouched poking theembers. At times a long tongue of flame would lick around the rim of the great pot, lighting up vividly for a moment the inside of the chimney with its raggy coating of soot, the mouth of the half-closed oven, the toothed jack and the hollow knobs surrounding the cast-iron dogs. The sudden illumination would strike from below upwards upon the faces of the oldsters seated in the *cantou* (chimney-corner, *ingle-neuk*), accentuating in cruel caricature the worn feature,—bony cheekbones, hairy nostrils, raped chins or bushy beards ensconced between the long, drooping points of the old-fashioned shirt-collars.

Upstairs the younger men were drinking, shouting, trying to dance a country jig without music, shaking the floor with their heavy tread. Down below were assembled only the more sedate, people who had come to attend the mass and not for the sake of guzzling and drinking. Every other minute the door would open and another goodman, another widow, would greet the mistress of the house with a “*Hé! adusias, Mère Brandou!*” uttered in

the most lamentable tone of voice. This said, they would put down their lantern under the stairs and take their stand with the rest, arms hanging by their sides and never speaking a word.

Some of these Limousins, small, sickly-looking men, had long, patient faces, and the same look of animal resignation we see in the peasants of the seventeenth century in the pictures of the brothers Le Nain. Others were yellow-complexioned, with the flat nose and prominent cheek-bones of the Mongolian type. The old women, with withered, furrowed visages, wore the crossed fichu of muslin under their cloak and the *palhole* with velvet ribbons on top of their cap. The younger ones, however, were dressed in town fashions and wore the cap only, all covered with ruchings of lace and set off with broad muslin strings that were spread out over the bosom and tied in a handsome knot. They looked absurdly like the dolls of our childhood, cardboard dolls that had two little red discs painted on the cheeks and two little black bandeaux of hair painted on the temples.

In a low voice Denise pointed out the best known members of the company to M. Lapeyrie.

That big man, with red hair turning grey, goggle eyes and fat hands, was Chabrilat, the *peilharo*, or ragman, famous as a drinker and more famous still as a story teller. How many casks had been emptied down his gullet! That little old fellow in an otter-skin skull-cap was Buneil, the ex-magister, the "village lawyer," the jack-of-all trades, who sings in the choir, kills pigs, arranges

marriages and compromises law-suits, and on a great sheet of foolscap, in a big old-fashioned round-hand, writes petitions to the "government." And here, in the corner, a meagre, ragged figure, his sightless eyes half hidden under the reddened lids, his head thrown back and his enormous mouth showing the yellow, protruding teeth in an imbecile grin, sat Fauche, the blind man of the Waterfalls. And yonder, that old crone, who even to-night had brought her distaff of brown wool with her, that old Choctaw with the great nose and only two tusks left by way of teeth, one in either jaw, was Fabbrillat's rival as a teller of tales in the patois, Lionardoune by name.

But the figure that most drew M. Lapeyrie's attention was Fortunade Brandou. Slim and frail in her Sunday frock and white collar, she moved to and fro in the crowded kitchen without saying anything and without seeming to see anybody. Every other second the sound of her own name in Mère Brandou's strident voice would make her jump, as if suddenly roused out of a dream. Down to the cellar, up again, down again, she went, carrying the bottles of wine they kept calling for from upstairs with uproarious shouts and a terrific stamping of feet. Indifferent to the clumsy attentions of the lads in paletots, white shirts and fancy cravats, heedless of the mock gallantries of old Mère Buneil, she never lost her pensive smile, her look of sadness and suffering.

"Shut the door! There's not an inch of room left. It's enough to kill a body, *boun Diou!*"

vociferated the mistress of the house as she saw another fresh arrival at the door.

But her fierce tirade was checked on her lips. She seemed to swallow down something bitter, and in a lower voice that still rang with ill-concealed vexation :

"You've come after something, Veydrenne?" To which he replied :

"I've come to drink a glass and warm myself at your fire, like the rest."

He had not removed his hat, an old felt that had once had a silky nap and which threw a dark shadow over all the upper part of his face. M. Lapeyrie, who was looking at him curiously, could see nothing but his black beard, cropped short, and his thick-lipped, taciturn mouth. He wore breeches of greenish velveteen and a sleeved waistcoat of undyed wool, spun and woven in the district. Suddenly the fire burned up, and cast a red gleam right in his eyes, revealing the man's face for a flash—an olive-complexioned, southern face, with coal-black eyebrows, a straight nose and wild, furtive, quick-glancing eyes like a poacher's dog's. The general expression was one of gloomy suspicion. When Veydrenne spoke, it was in short, stammering sentences, that broke off in the middle, as is the way of lonely dwellers in the woods, accustomed to the silence of desert places.

M. Lapeyrie had looked to see a more picturesque villain. He was surprised Veydrenne wore no air of distrust towards people, all of whom he had blackmailed in the way of his business, who, all

ared and hated him. But the peasant is only coward when alone and unsupported; the men gathered in the inn, and even the women, were encouraged by their numbers to adopt an attitude of unspoken, mocking contempt. The senate of elders in the *cantou* ignored the intruder, as the latter, firmly planted on his sturdy legs, his hat tilted over his nose, stood staring into the fire. Perhaps he felt no rancour, no one interfering with him; he could afford to despise the general scorn, which took no active shape, in the secret satisfaction a half-savage nature finds in the certainty of unmatched physical strength.

Presently Chabrillat, the drunkard, made an attempt at friendliness with the intruder.

"Hullo, my beauty! you'll pay for a pint?"

The company sniggered, for Veydrenne never aid. Mère Brandou, in a fury, dug her elbow in the *peilharo's* back; but Veydrenne growled out:

"And why shouldn't I pay, if I so choose?"

"Fortunade!" cried the *peilharo*; "did you hear? A bottle of wine! Veydrenne's to pay the shot. And then, even if he don't pay, Mère Brandou will give *him* credit, while a poor devil like me can't get one pennyworth on tick. 'You're thirsty, eh? pay up on the nail!' that's what she tells *me*."

"Bah! he's tipsy already!" snapped the mistress of the inn, pushing Chabrillat towards the door. "Out you go, there!"

But Veydrenne shrugged his shoulders, and without a word, an embarrassed and almost shamefaced

look on his face, drew a coin from his waistcoat pocket and laid it in the palm of the astounded landlady. A piece of money, a real piece of good silver money! He was paying his score! actually paying, for the first time in his life! . . . Mère Brandou could not get over her amazement.

"Well, what now?" ejaculated Veydrenne, churlishly. "You've never seen a bit of money before?"

"Not of yours, not often."

"If you don't like the look of it, best give it back."

"You're paying for Chabrillat too?"

The man nodded, and the landlady proceeded to hail Fortunade in her shrillest tones:

"Hi, lazybones! a bottle of wine,—and glasses!"

Mentally she was reckoning up all Veydrenne owed her for "ages and ages." He had paid once, so he should always pay, or else . . . The superstitious terror her strange customer had inspired her with was gone, and she was turning over a hundred different ways of profiting by his new-found honesty.

"The beggar!" she thought; "he must be rich! How can one ever tell? Maybe he has murdered somebody,"—and she recalled how criminals generally betray themselves by throwing about their money with unaccustomed lavishness.

Meantime, Chabrillat, lifting his glass brimming with red wine, was gazing at it with eyes of maudlin affection:

"It's true enough, I love it!" he hiccuped. "But

it don't love me, 'cause it knocks the legs from under me, it does ! Still, I can forgive it anything, Don't talk to me of your filthy messes of vermouth and absinth it's all the fashion to drink now-a-days. Wine, my good lads, it's wine takes the first place in the good things of this world,—more, by token, it's wine they put in the chalice on the altar, and if it ran short, there'd be no more Mass, seeing as how the Curés could only make half the Almighty."

"And that's why the Curés are so fond of wine !" put in the man with the otter-skin cap.

The witticism made everybody laugh, and tongues were loosened. An old fellow snoring in a corner woke up to exclaim that the Curés were no fools, not they, and didn't stint themselves of anything. A cask of wine didn't scare 'em, nor a pretty woman neither ! Oh ! dear-a-me ! the Curé of L——, he had brats all round the countryside, the very image of himself. And Chabrillat, starting on a dirty story of the Priests' amours with noble ladies, a burst of delighted applause went round the hearth. The *peilharo*, proud of his success, turned to the "gentleman from Paris," as if to appeal to him for corroboration. Denise pretended not to hear. But the other women, the same who were going to communicate at midnight, listened with amusement, or at least, without disgust.

It is a local tradition. The peasant of the Limousin, superstitious rather than religious, more attached to old customs than to ideas or beliefs, still keeps in the dim background of his mind his old distrust of the Priests, his old grudge about tithes,

his old terror of a counter-revolution. The Curé, not exactly the one of his own village, whom very likely he esteems and respects, but the typical, symbolical Curé, is still in his eyes the same as his forerunners in the Middle Ages are described,—a drinker and a glutton, a profligate, and above all, a lazy drone. No *velhade* is complete without satirical tales or songs in which the Curé plays a part that is ridiculous rather than really odious. Nobody takes offence. The children go just as regularly to be catechised and the women to be confessed.

Little Fortunade was the only one to show any signs of impatience. Kneeling in front of the hearth before the ruddy blaze, she was frying *gogues*, so shiny and black, they looked as if they had been varnished. Her head, with its smooth tresses divided by a very fine parting, almost touched Veydrenne's elbow; and the emperor of the poachers of Monadouze, buried in a brown study, in which new and baffling thoughts were perhaps dimly formulating themselves, drew back a little to avoid coming in contact with the girl.

CHAPTER V

SUDDENLY, above the uproar of voices and trampling feet, the rattling of plates and the hissing of the frying pan, the first stroke of midnight sounds. Then, while the clock tells out eleven other strokes, each clear and distinct, the joyous hurricane of the carillons is let loose to come pouring into the stifling room along with the dark and chill and damp of the night. The glasses jingle on the shelves, the lamp sways and smokes at the inrush. All those seated spring to their feet, and soon the women, donning cloaks and pulling down hoods, begin to file out, one after the other, in silence.

“At last!” sighs Denise, as she and her uncle walk forth. The granite steps are wet. Everywhere are hurrying, indistinct figures, preceded by the little reddish halo of a swinging lantern, and accompanied by a muttering of words and a click-clack of wooden shoes. And yonder in the darkness stands the old church, a hive of souls, shooting forth a feeble illumination from its open door and stained-glass windows, to attract this nocturnal swarm of worshippers.

At the threshold they pause with closed lips and

bared heads, make their reverence to the high altar, dip fingers in the holy water, stoop, cross themselves emphatically, and then separate,—women to the left, men to the right. The hive, as it fills little by little, hums loud with the vibrations of its four bells that are still swinging and ringing in their stone cells aloft. The flagstones strike chill as ice, the very tapers on the altar shudder with cold. But every moment the air grows warmer, as it does in a stable, and before long the church would be reeking with the peculiar odour a country crowd has, the “smell of poverty,” had not the scent of burning wax mingled with the heartening savour of bitter box and resinous fir and acrid juniper.

Denise and M. Lapeyrie chose seats rather at the back, not to draw overmuch observation. All Monadouze was there, even including the Municipal Council and the functionaries of government represented by the letter-carrier, the postmistress and the primary schoolmistress. Nay, the very same scoffers whom we saw just now at the inn bandying coarse jokes against the priests have come with the rest, Fauche the blind man among the number, and Chabrilat the *peilharo*. It is not devotion brings them, but the force of ancient tradition, an instinctive wish to round off the festival, complete with all the ceremonies and observances fixed by time-honoured custom. Attendance at mass, a visit to the fair, the elections, parliamentary and municipal, are the peasant's sole distractions, the only opportunities he has of participating in the general life of society at large. “To live always with the beasts, a man

grows a beast," he says, to explain or excuse his coming to church. This feeling was universal among the folks of Monadouze and it caused them no surprise, therefore, to see Mademoiselle Cayrol appear year by year at the midnight Mass or at the great Easter Mass. She thought good to come, and it was a very suitable distraction for a woman, not a doubt of it.

The office begins amid a great scraping and shifting of chairs. An old woman advances to ask Denise in a whisper if she would not like a better place, near the manger, still shrouded within its muslin curtains only to be withdrawn at the Elevation. But she declines with a smile. Meantime, Fortunade, seated among the "Children of Mary," turns her veiled head and gives a little friendly nod as much as to say: "I am so happy for us all to be here; I will pray for you." In the background a blue cloud rises in light, lingering spirals and slowly melts away, impregnating the heated atmosphere with a faint Oriental languor. The altar tapers, the silver vases, the gold of the tabernacle gleam, as if from far away, looming through the vaporous glory of the incense. . . Denise thinks of the Three Kings and their precious offerings, and the Star of Bethlehem. Her imagination,—in default of her heart, she tells herself,—is still sensible to the charm of the beautiful Christian legend. . . And now, from the choir-seats, rise voices that quaver a little and falter and are not quite in unison:

"Reveillez-vous, pastourelles."*

* Awake, awake, shepherdesses. . .

The old-world melody trembles like a reflexion in water, breaks its frail line, drags its minor cadences. The verses, half French, half patois, call up the image of the stiff, naive, marionette-like figures a shepherd lad carves out with his pocket-knife,—the Virgin and Child, the shepherds, the innocent beasts that share in the joy of mankind. When the refrain comes, everybody joins in in the nave, louder and louder, with a harsh, drawling intonation that confuses the words and has something wild and half-savage about it.

The roof seems ready to lift, and the four evangelists who support the old pulpit, striped and speckled,—ochre, indigo, vermilion,—as gaudily as Sioux braves, and flanked by their symbolic beasts, shiver and shake between the heavy festoons of carved wood and the gilded vine garlands. Their goggle eyes in their full-moon faces stare out at the wrinkled countenances, the bald heads, the *palholes* and caps; all the generations they have seen go by were so like each other they really cannot distinguish the Christians of to-day from the Christians of yesterday. . . . The rite never varies, governed as it is by immemorial custom; the same *pastorale*, to the same bagpipe accompaniment, rouses year by year the echoes of the same walls. For four centuries nothing, or almost nothing, in the church has been changed, save the venerable St. Christopher who has fallen to pieces with age and been replaced by a "Sacré Cœur," all pink and blue, and the Pietà over the altar, touching in its very ugliness, that has been sold to a collector and

upplanted by a lady in crinoline and a Spanish mantilla.

Denise, her hands folded in her lap and her fair head bowed, smiles as she recalls the past. She pictures to herself the Christmas days of her childhood, the shoes deposited at the chimney-corner, her mother's gentle face that is growing dim now in her memory. She recalls the Christmas days at the Convent, one in particular,—when she was fourteen and took her last Communion. The sort of religious ecstasy that had seized her, the broken joys, the happy tears, then the ineffable inward peace, with its tinge of melancholy, of the satisfied soul,—how all these emotions had grown strange, most incomprehensible, to her!

“It was all an intoxication of the imagination!” she thought, with a touch of ironical condescension for the little enthusiastic Denise of former days. She does not regret, does not wish to renew this “intoxication,” which she has outgrown. Her father's serene scepticism had won her over, little by little, without violence or crisis, when she was between sixteen and eighteen. Her theories of life have been modified, transformed almost unconsciously. Now she is, not exactly hostile, but more than indifferent to the Catholicism of the present day, in which, like Dr. Cayrol, she sees only a political party devoid of the spirit of charity, a collection of dogmas divorced from morality and hostile to the spread of scientific knowledge which is modernizing them. She finds in herself and her surroundings motives sufficient for being just, truthful, pure—

mind and pitiful-hearted, for increasing to the best of her powers the sum of good and diminishing the sum of evil. Her reason accepts courageously the inexplicable accidents inseparable from the conditions of human life. She is no coward in presence of pain and grief; in no cowardly spirit she will face old age and death when they come. She feels less need of God than of men, her brothers, whose pleasures and pains she shares and their mysterious destiny.

Nevertheless, Denise finds a satisfaction in going to church. It is not an æsthetic gratification she seeks there, but shade and silence and the perfume of the past. Our villages and small towns hardly possess any buildings that do not directly serve the needs of material and social life; remote from libraries, museums, great historical edifices that recall the nation's past, the contemplative soul can find nowhere to retire to for self-communion, for the development of the inner life. Mairies, préfectures, market-halls are hardly suitable places for evoking associations or indulging in quiet meditation. But the church, even though no more God's house, is still the sacred asylum of dreams, the spot where human griefs and human hopes have beaten with a stronger pulse than anywhere else on earth.

Denise, who was modest enough, and believed herself to be the least complex of women, never stopped to analyse the pleasure she experienced in her rare visits to the church at Monadouze. She only told herself: "I love to remember, and the church helps me to recall the days of childhood and my mother's

face." Nor did she confound this affection for the past—her own past—with home-sickness for a lost faith in religion.

So when the Abbé Barbazan ascends the pulpit, Denise has no apprehensions of his discourse troubling her peace of mind. She smiles and makes a little signal to her uncle, as much as to say:

"Listen, mind you listen. The sermon will be well worth hearing."

The Curé, a short, thick-set man, with a red face and iron-grey hair, who wears the surplice as if it were a peasant's blouse, is famous in the locality. "He loves good cheer," say the folks of Eyguières; "he chants out of tune," declare the men of Bar. But Monadouze scorns the calumnies of envious neighbours and is just as proud of the Abbé Barbazan as it is of Dr. Cayrol. A good gardener, a clever bee-keeper, the priest is of the same stock as his parishioners. He preaches in patois, and is far fonder of quoting the outspoken saws of the countryside than the sounding Latin phrases of the Fathers. The works of the field, the season of the year, the weather, the most trivial events of rural life, all supply him with matter for parables, instances and telling morals.

Bending a little over the ledge of the pulpit, whence he dominates the four gaudily-coloured Evangelists, he throws a comprehensive look round about him, as if casting a net over his congregation.

A noise of coughing—a great scraping of chairs. A little lad of three suddenly wakes up in his mother's lap and demands:

"*Nadalou*?* where is he—*Nadalou*? "

"H'sh! h'sh!" the good woman silences him.

The older women smile. The Curé Barbazan shows no annoyance; he knows how to recall the attention of his audience.

"My dear brethren," he begins, in a good-humoured tone, "I don't want to vex the good Christian dames who have brought their 'young rogues' here, thinking to do well; but, when Our Lord said: 'Let the little children come unto Me' it was not past midnight. You may be sure the Virgin would never have taken her divine Babe out of the manger, even if he had cried to see the shepherds and the magi and the star.

"Nevertheless, my brethren, it is very dear to my heart, the cry of that innocent who hopes to see *Nadalou*, and I might tell you in all humility that the cry is my sermon in brief.

"Is it not the truth that we are waiting, every year, the blessed hour when Jesus was born, as if Jesus were going to be born again? We become little children again in our impatience and joy. It seems that magnificent gifts are promised us.

"Noël, *Nadalou*, when will you come? What will you bring us? It is the child's thought, it is the Christian's thought, it was the thought of the men of old time. Hear the Saviour answer: 'For the children, fruits and sweetmeats. For the men of good will, the hope of eternal life.' "

The Curé stopped a moment to readjust his stole.

* Noël, Christmas, Father Christmas.

No one stirred; the little lad had dropped asleep again.

"My brethren, I spoke of the men of old time who waited for the Nativity for thousands and thousands of years. There were among them ignorant heathens who worshipped idols, and Jews who adored the true God, Creator of the heavens and the earth. These were more advanced and happier than the heathen, but their happiness was not yet perfect, for none of them could have that hope of eternal life which is the gift of Christ to the Christians.

"Just think a moment of their sad condition. These favoured Jews knew indeed the true God. Yes, but it was God the Father, infinitely great, infinitely adorable, and yet very terrible, always environed with thunders and lightnings. Moses alone could draw near Him, and the poor peasants, good simple folk like you, were horribly afraid of Him, for they thought rather of His majesty, His justice than of His love, and that hindered them from praying, from telling the Most High of their petty affairs. And then they all had on their conscience the accursed sin of Adam who, you must never forget, had brought death into the world.

"Of Paradise there was no question, and death seemed the more ugly therefor. The souls of the just, said the Prophets, went into limbo, the place where the souls of children who die without baptism go. True, the Prophets likewise declared that the Messiah would deliver them, these souls of just men, and would set them in God's bosom.

But all this was not clear. Moreover, the Prophets, you see, did not prophesy for simple folks to understand, because they spoke in a fashion so sublime, so hard to comprehend, that their holy words were just like the Latin of the Mass-book for you. And still, my brethren, I expound the Latin for you; whereas the prophecies, these were a matter for the priests and learned men to interpret, and these Jewish priests gave very little heed to the poor people of the earth.

“As for the heathens, they worshipped the gods of the Pagans, the graven images you still go to see for a show in museums; but they believed that beasts and men all were in the same case after death. They had not so much as heard tell of the Messiah, and they looked for nothing whatever save annihilation. The rich strove to forget this ugly thought in rioting and wantonness and taking their pleasure, each after his own heart, not without falling into horrible sins. But the unhappy, the sick, the widows and orphans found life very miserable, and that set them thinking. Man does not resign himself easily to bearing evil and injustice, to seeing him and his dying the death, without knowing the reason of it all. He craves justice; he craves consolation. Now true justice, you know, is not of this world, and what consolation is there for a dying man if he does not believe in the immortality of the soul and the resurrection of the body? Brave it out as he may, he sweats with fear when he thinks of the shroud and the grave and the worms.

"But men, even the savages, and the heathen, have always had a sort of instinct, a gleam of hope. They always told themselves that it could not last for ever like this, that they would know, perhaps, one day what there was beyond this life.

"It was their way, the way these people had, to wait for the unknown Christ. All mankind was like that little lad who longs for *Nadalou* without knowing what he expects. And lo! the Christ, the desired of the Nations, is come. He has set up so great a light in the world that we have been able to see what was a-doing beyond this life. And even in this life he has repaired the injustice of things, since even on the most miserable he bestows a greater share of love.

"Who shall take the place of Christ, my brethren? What physician, howsoever learned in science, shall console the dying man whom he cannot cure? To hide the horror of the grave from him he will give him drugs that make him sleep, that kill thought, that benumb the anxious soul. . . or else he will make him lying speeches, out of kindness. But Christians have no need of opium nor of lies, because they have the hope, the assured certainty of eternal life."

The Curé returned again and again to the same theme, labouring and developing his subject, reiterating his thoughts and phrases, to drive them home in his hearers' thick skulls. He instanced people of the parish, Dame Cornil, old Chadebech, who had patiently borne cruel trials and had made a holy ending. He described the calm cheerfulness

of the Christian contrasted with the gloomy arrogance, the secret anguish of the unbeliever.

The peasants understood his meaning, for they nearly all shared, not so much any physical fear of death as a superstitious dread of what might lie beyond the grave. Their passive fatalism was indeed a very different thing from the calm Christian cheerfulness the preacher had dwelt on, but they were not loath to listen to these reassuring statements. The old in especial were delighted to hear that death is non-existent, that a man rises again with his bones and flesh and earthly form, for the idea of immortality is summed up for them in the notion of the indestructibility of the body, and they can form no conception of the soul. The young people were more sceptical and never let their thoughts dwell on the terrifying crisis of dissolution, that seemed so far away! All their aspirations were of the earth earthy; their incredulity was only indolence of mind, having no better motive or logical basis than their old-time faith.

Denise was an attentive listener. She had appreciated the allusion to the impotence of the physician, "learned in human science,"—and she said to herself:

"The Curé is wrong. What makes death so terrifying is the dread of what is to follow. Mere annihilation is less appalling than to face the unknown."

It was her father's own thought, but she did not dwell on it. The office proceeded. Presently,

the silvery tinkle of the Sanctus bell bowed all heads. Then, in a blue cloud of incense, two white-veiled figures rose and uncovered the manger, while the monstrance was lowered. The waxen Jesus became visible, in his short shift, rosy amid the yellow straw. Fortunade, bending over, handled the little figure and settled it as if it were a real baby, while unmarried girls and women of all ages quivered with an instinctive impulse of motherhood.

"There," thought Denise, "is the infant vowed to the fond caresses of all women who are never to be mothers. Their God suffices to satisfy all the cravings of their heart. He is the mystic bridegroom and He takes on the form of a little child."

And she sighed, for her uncle's words recurred to her memory, and she wondered to find herself a happy woman, she who had no God any more, who had no husband, and who would never be a mother.

CHAPTER VI

“**A**RE you going to Le Chastang then, father?”

“Yes. Hold the pony, Denise; the girth is undone. My goat-skin now, and my rug. There’s plenty of charcoal, is there, in the foot-warmer? Good!”

The doctor stroked the little nag’s nose and climbed into the gig. Denise stood away, and leaning on the garden-gate between the two spindle-trees, with their snow-laden boughs, watched her father drawing on his great fur gloves.

“Be careful, father!”

“The pony is roughed, and he is a sure-footed beast; and then, I shall walk down the hills. You need not be afraid.”

“I meant to say you should have a care of those Veydrennes. The old man hates you.”

“He is in his dotage, the old fellow. As for the son, why, if Fortunade had not come for me at the time of the accident, I certainly should not put myself out for that scum. But I must say I like a piece of work well done, and, seeing I have reduced the fracture, I mean to complete the cure. He might very easily be a cripple for life, your Master Veydrenne might!”

"That would be bad for his poaching."

"And that's why I ask myself if it is not immoral to set the ruffian on his legs again. . . . What are *you* going to do with yourself, Nise?"

"Perhaps I shall go to Monadouze. Maria Branolou has had some lemons sent, and we want some or Jean's lemonade."

Speaking to one another, Cayrol and Denise habitually called their boarder "Jean" without title or surname.

"Good-bye, Nise, till we meet again."

"Good-bye, father."

The gig drove away, and Denise returned to the house.

She went up to the first floor. A corridor paved with red tiles ran through the house from end to end, separating the rooms that opened to the front from those facing north, which were little used. The old-fashioned staircase, divided by landings floored with brick, turned as it rose in the half-light to reach the upper storey, consisting of a loft and two attics reserved for Françonnette's use.

The heating-stove, burning night and day in the vestibule, radiated a moderate degree of warmth all through the house. Denise stopped before Jean's door. He was resting quietly after a night of pain. The girl thought of the lemons she had sent for and congratulated herself on the surprise she would give him when he woke. In the slow monotony of his days, the most trivial incidents assumed an exaggerated importance. Jean Favières looked forward to the postman's arrival as to an important event;

he made the doctor tell him five or six times over the little stories he brought back from his visits to patients; he never wearied of looking at any branch of winter leaves Denise had gathered for him, and if oranges and lemons ran short, he was as peevish about it as a child. With the intuition which born nurses possess, and which is another form of the maternal instinct, Mademoiselle Cayrol divined the moral temperature of her patient, the need of amusement or of rest which he was hardly conscious of himself; she knew how to keep him occupied without tiring him, when to temper the light, to draw the blinds, to divert him with talk or leave him to the solitude that soothes the over-strained nerves.

Denise went to her bedroom to dress. Standing before the round mirror of the "Empire" dressing-table, in which she could never see herself at full length, she adjusted the hat with the pheasant's feathers on her head. The reflection of the snow outside filtered through the white curtains and threw a crude light on the woodwork, painted a dull grey, and the mahogany furniture of the room. To the right, in a line with the windows, was a recess between two broad spaces of panelling decorated with rounded mouldings and shell ornament. The bed, of light walnut, was set off with little columns of the same wood, and had a daisy carved on each of its triangular pediments. It was almost hidden beneath the hangings of Jouy chintz, with pictures in red and white representing the gardens of Armida and the tents of the Saracen host. The chimney-piece, of wood, with a pier-glass over,

aced the bed; it supported an alabaster timepiece, in the shape of a Greek temple, and two empty cases of crystal. Sphinx's heads glittered at the corners of the chest of drawers. The oval marble table rested on three clawed feet. There were two chairs covered with coarse tapestry with needlework figures, shepherdess and page in the "troubadour" taste of the Restoration period. The swan-necked shepherdesses wore Utrecht velvet, the staring gold of which had faded to a warm, deep, subdued yellow. This oddly assorted furniture, which was of no great value, and curious rather than beautiful, had been "in the family," for three generations. It had belonged, somewhere about 1808, to Lucile de Fontenoire, mother of Célesta Bouyer, whose daughter married a Lapeyrie. Valentine Lapeyrie, grand-daughter of Célesta, became Madame Cayrol.

If Denise had passed more of her time in the room, her youth and brightness would have given back life and soul to the old-fashioned, out-of-date furniture. But the girl always sat in the dining-room or else in the doctor's study. The room wore the sedate look of a priest's quarters or a convent parlour. Crucifix and Madonna were missing, but the cold blossoms of monastic renunciation flourished in this virgin chamber no less than in the cell of a nun. The stiff-backed chairs frowned at any indulgence in indolence; the great beam across the ceiling seemed to crush down any inclination to idle thoughts. There was nothing to appeal to the senses, nothing to stir the imagination. Every-

thing told of the busy life of a girl who rose with the servant-maids, washed in spring water with unscented soap, never lingered before her looking-glass, and who donned morning after morning the same gown, a garment of severe cut, very neat, but a trifle shabby.

Nevertheless, on top of the chest of drawers lay a few books, in well-worn bindings, which Denise turns over on evenings when she is alone and sad. There are no novels amongst them; all are old-fashioned, forgotten books such as brought sentimental tears to the eyes of her great-grandmothers, Célesta Bouyer and Lucile de Fontenoire,—the *Confidences* and the *Premières Méditations* of Alphonse de Lamartine.

Before starting, Denise said a word to Fortunade, who was sewing in a room on the ground floor :

“I am going to your mother’s, and I shall call in at the post-office to bid good-day to Mademoiselle Muret. If Monsieur Jean rings, you must go up at once.”

“Oh ! Mademoiselle !”

“What now ?”

“I am afraid to speak to him—Monsieur Jean. He frightens me. Everything puts him out when you are not there.”

“Frightens you ? How silly you are, my poor child ! You are afraid of an invalid, because he is exacting and full of fancies ! And you wanted to be a Sister of Charity !”

Denise shrugged her shoulders.

“Ah ! yes,” stammered Fortunade in embarrass-

ment, "perhaps you are right. I am a silly fool, out, as our dear Sisters say, grace comes with the veil."

"But *I* wear no veil."

"Oh! you—you——."

"Yes, well?"

"You know how to talk to him, this Paris gentleman. Why, I think if I am afraid of him, he is afraid of you. He goes against Françounette, and even Monsieur le Docteur; with you he is as gentle as gentle, and is ashamed to show his bad disposition."

"He has not a bad disposition."

"He is spoilt, like all rich folks. He cannot bear pain. Do you suppose, in our country parts, they cocker up sick people the same as you do! Once they're warm and cosy between the blankets, and have drunk their gruel, there's an end of it, I tell you! We haven't time for more. And there's many a one has no good bed to lie on either, or good gruel to drink, and nobody is so mighty sorry for 'em."

"You are hard-hearted."

"Do you imagine young Veydrenne is very comfortable with his broken leg? Yet who thinks of him, who looks after him?"

"Veydrenne is not altogether neglected, child. You have been very good to him, and my father has set his leg as carefully as he would a millionaire's. He has even gone back to see him to-day."

"Oh! ah!" said Fortunade, "Monsieur le Docteur and you, there's no better people on earth."

When Denise was gone, she picked up again the heavy bicycling stockings she was darning. If only the Parisian would take a nice long nap!

She was ready and willing to help him, when called upon, and always mentioned his name in her prayers, that he might get well soon and bear his illness like a good Christian. But for all that the young man, so good-looking and highly educated, wealthy, as she believed, and who no doubt had had a plentiful share of enjoyment in his life, she had only a half-hearted pity to bestow on him. She had seen, at close quarters, a more poignant wretchedness, not only of body but of mind, and the thought of the tortured soul, devoted to everlasting perdition, overwhelmed her with commiseration.

She recalled that terrible night of the Epiphany. The year had opened with a spell of such intense cold that the pools had all frozen hard in four days and the keepers from the Château had hired men to break up the ice. And then, on Twelfth Night eve, these men, on their way back to Monadouze by the chestnut-woods of Saint-Dumine, had come upon Martial Veydrenne lying on the ground with a broken leg, half-dead with cold, hunger and fever. He had spent the whole night there.

What an event for Monadouze! Old women in their Sunday *coiffes*, "young rogues" not yet put to bed, even good folks busy eating their supper at home, and fellows who had already gone to the inn and were half-seas over, all had come crowding round, out of curiosity or else a sly, ugly spite.

The Maire was at Tulle; the Curé was dining at the Château, and in the absence of the authorities, the *garde champêtre* did not know what to do. Clap Veydrenne in a *charretou*, like a pig for market, harness in Mère Brandou's little grey donkey, and drive the injured man to the station for the seven o'clock train, that would be the best thing, perhaps? Once at the Hospital at Tulle, Veydrenne, whether cured or killed, would be a good riddance for the commune. But Veydrenne would have none of the Hospital; he clamoured to be taken to Le Chastang, to his old father's. He threatened and swore and talked away half deliriously. His leg was fearfully swollen and began to show ugly-looking livid patches. Finally, while the *garde champêtre* and the inn-keeper were squabbling about the *charretou*, Fortunade had despatched her little brother double quick to the doctor's. Then M. Cayrol had come on the scene, and silence had fallen upon the curious crowd; Mère Brandou, like it or no, had had to install the injured man on a pallet in the little room off the kitchen where the maids lie when they have to give up their bed to travellers.

"Who's going to pay me for the clean sheets and the candle-light and the brandy and the general inconvenience?" lamented Mère Brandou, while Fortunade was bringing a tumbler of very hot grog, a broad basin, bandages and splints of chestnut-wood.

She longed to slap her daughter, and to vent her ill temper she pulled the innocent Marcellin's ears unmercifully.

Next day, the Père Veydrenne heard the news from his neighbours and came to demand his son. It was ten in the forenoon; the men were all at their work, and the women, who were peeling potatoes or knitting stockings at their doors, were dreadfully scared at sight of the old blacksmith. Mère Brandou, indeed, fearing a spell might be cast over her house, offered the *charretou* and the donkey, and Fortunade to go with the equipage and bring it home again. Face to face with the aged *metje*—he was eighty and more wrinkled than an old chestnut, and one look of his eye could give people the fever or take it away again, which made the doctors mad with jealousy!—the landlady durst not breathe a word about payment. So the *charretou*, with the injured man, and Fortunade leading the donkey, had finally arrived at Le Chastang, making its way by difficult roads in the black cold of a January frost.

Bad as her company was, Fortunade had felt no fear. She knew the old man's good-will was won, and that she would return safe and sound with her donkey and cart. The two Veydrennes were not incapable of the sort of gratitude practised by savages, and which they practised too, though rarely, because opportunities were rare. Neither made any mistake as to the real motives of Mère Brandou's kindness, but they felt instinctively that Fortunade was not their enemy. They did not thank her; nevertheless she could guess these two would never wish her ill. After the patient was settled on his mattress of maize straw, the girl

accepted a hunch of cold pudding and a drink of white wine in a cracked glass and returned to Monadouze sadly enough.

Ever since the picture had stuck in her mind,—Jeydrenne lying sick and forsaken in the hovel, beside the old dotard *metje*. Wherever she was working, at the Château or at the Cayrols', wherever he might be, at church or at the inn, the vision haunted her and seemed to reproach her. No, nothing would ever give her pleasure any more, neither good meals, nor the cheerful blaze of the fireside nor the warmth of her bed, nor even little Marcellin's kisses. She had a vague impression of a huge injustice which no one about her would realise. But *she* had realised it—there could be no more happiness for her henceforth.

"Why," she would ask herself, "why torment myself? I cannot banish sorrow from the world. There will always be sinners and poor unhappy creatures in it."

But no arguments could satisfy her. The infinitude of human wretchedness weighed upon her humble spirit, and there were times when she felt herself possessed and driven forward by a mysterious power to which she could not give a name, and which was pity, pity deaf and blind, and strong as love.

Denise was still abroad when the bell sounded its peremptory summons. Fortunade mastered her unwillingness and made her way upstairs to Jean's room.

Her reception was not encouraging.

"Well, well! why, I have been ringing for ten minutes."

"Oh! Monsieur, I came up directly."

She stood stiffly in the middle of the room, her chin drawn in and the lids lowered over her dark eyes, which swam with indignant tears.

"Monsieur is not fair to me."

"Now, don't begin to cry, I beg you, and make yourself out a martyr! Will you pull up the blind I like plenty of light."

She did so, and the brilliant reflection of the sun poured in at the tall window. The white-enamelled walls of the room, the polished furniture, the brass work of the little bedstead shone again.

"Make up the fire."

Fortunade threw on a log and replaced the metal fire-screen before the hearth. Jean was sitting sideways, his face showing thin and of a waxen pallor amid the disorder of the dark hair.

"That is right," he approved. "Now give me a drink of lemonade—thank you; you are a good girl after all, and very obliging . . . Pah! what horrible stuff! Whatever is it you have given me?"

"Lemonade, Monsieur."

"It is not fresh. Tell them to make another brew."

"There are no lemons. Mademoiselle has gone to fetch some."

"What! she has gone out?"

"Do you want her to live in your room? She has given herself a sick headache as it is, attending

o you since the nurse left."

The timid Fortunade was plucking up a spirit.

Jean muttered :

"When she is not there everything goes wrong."

"Hark! here she is. She has not had time to take a walk, poor thing; she was anxious about you."

Denise came in, carrying a plate of mandarine oranges and lemons.

"Here I am. Have you been awake long? Are you thirsty? Quick, Fortunade, the sugar, a jug of fresh water. Well, Monsieur Favières, what is it? you look quite upset."

"I am full of remorse!"

"Remorse about what?"

"I am a selfish brute."

"A selfish brute?"

"Don't laugh; I am ashamed of myself. I never so much as noticed you have a headache. You are losing your health, which becomes you so. I won't leave it; I would rather go away altogether."

"Where to?"

"To a sanatorium, or to my godfather's, or—oh! anywhere."

"Look at me, and that will stop your remorse. Do I look well?"

The young man smiled :

"Yes. Some snowflakes have fallen from the trees on your hair, and you are crowned with a coronal of water-drops."

"And you too, you look better."

"Really and truly?"

"You are not the same man I welcomed last month at Monadouze railway station."

"The evening I first saw you, in a horrid cloak and a horrid hood, looking for all the world like a lumpish black church-bell!"

"I was disagreeable?"

"Very cross and snappish! But the church-bell had a delightful ring of its own. Your voice is so clear! You told me to 'Take care!' and you offered me your hand. And then you said: 'Don't talk!' That first evening I hated you. You had a protecting way about you that humiliated me."

"Pride!"

"My pride is all gone, I display my weaknesses, physical and moral, cynically. But it will all soon be altered. I am regaining my strength. Your father is right; with youth, good-will and good nursing, we can do wonders. Ah! if I had only come here a year sooner! But it is not too late. I had a friend, in the third stage of consumption, who got well. I am not in the third stage."

"No, of course not! Now I am going to make your lemonade, and divide up an orange, with plenty of powdered sugar,—the way you like. And if you are very good I will give you a letter that has come for you."

"From Paris?"

"I don't know."

"Oh! let me have it. My mother writes to say she is coming, perhaps."

Denise handed him the letter. Glancing at the envelope:

“No!” he cried; “it is from Hubertin.”

He read the letter, while Denise, sitting at the foot of the bed, was peeling the oranges with a mother-o'-pearl handled knife. The rind collected in a fragrant heap of little spirals in the girl's lap. The light fell on her from behind and made a misty halo round her head, as it played amid her fair hair. Lids were lowered and lips shut, masking the brilliancy of eyes and teeth, so that the girl's whole shape was half-lost in a soft gloom, with just a gleam of light at the bosom where the thin gold chain hung.

The letter slipped from the bed to the floor.

“Let it be,” sighed Jean, as Denise stooped to recover it. “It is a stupid, uninteresting letter. One of my friends informs me he is coming to see me next month.”

“And he will bore you?”

“Very likely.”

“Still, a friend.”

“Oh! when I say ‘a friend,’ it only means an acquaintance, a comrade. *I* have no friends. I have no parents even. My mother has not been to see me, and we are at the end of January.”

“She will not be long now.”

There was an interval of thoughtful silence; then Jean resumed:

“Happily I have you and your father. Without that——”

“And your godfather.”

“Yes, he is a friend too; but then he is not here, and you—you are. Without you——”

Denise saw he was getting feverish with all these disquieting thoughts and painful fancies, and urged him to drink his lemonade. He drained the glass and seemed to sink into a brown study, almost into a state of somnolence. Then suddenly rousing himself:

"That Hubertin! He is as strong as a horse—offensively, indecently healthy. If you could but see him! A great, big, burly, red-faced fellow, an athlete run to fat, who eats and drinks and shouts, and always pushes into the first place everywhere. Well! there are women who think him a handsome fellow. They have strange tastes, women have!"

"He must be hideous, your friend!"

"You think him hideous, do you? Then he can come. It will amuse you to see him. And I was envying him, can you believe it? actually envying him! What a fool I was! You see, it's because—because——"

"H'sh! you must not talk! you must take a rest. Go to sleep now!"

He soon dropped off, and Denise stepped to the couch and noted how the pale face twitched spasmodically. What nightmare was disturbing him now, in his sleep?

"Poor boy!" she sighed.

He was so young! She felt full of pity for him as she might for a child, forsaken or unloved, that is in pain and wants comforting and coaxing. Often too she thought of the neglectful mother and told herself indignantly:

"If I had a son I could not bear to know another

woman was beside him to nurse him. I should be at his bedside day and night; I would work miracles and not let him die."

Suddenly he starts awake again, open-eyed, and gazes round the dim room in the fading light. He sees the familiar figure bending over him.

"Don't leave me! . . . Don't leave me! I don't want to think of it any more. But when I am alone I cannot help it."

"You cannot help thinking of what? of whom?"

She holds in her hands the burning wrist in which the artery, excessively dilated, vibrates like a fiddle-string under the fiery bow of fever.

"Go to sleep again."

His mind grows confused, and half-deliriously he quavers:

"Ah! ah! . . . Juliette!"

This time Denise caught the name; and now she turns all red and embarrassed, as if she had surprised a furtive gesture, glimpsed a nudity she was not meant to see. She blushed furiously in the dark and felt a strange tightening at the heart.

Jean repeated the name—"Juliette!" as though calling upon the absent fickle one to return. Then his voice changed, as he murmured:

"Is it you over there?"

"Yes, I, Denise."

"Denise?"

Lightly with the tips of her fingers, she laid a slice of orange on the parched lips.

"That is good. Another!"

"Here it is. Another?"

He shook his head; and Denise watched him sinking into repose—for how many minutes?—and dropping off again into an uneasy sleep. She dared not go, or even leave the room a moment to ask for the lamp. She longed for her father's return; it was the hour at which, every day, the feverish fit came on, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, but never failing to arrive, a discouragement to the doctor, day by day burning up a little more of the frail young life.

CHAPTER VII

THE stable and coach-house stood at the bottom of the garden and opened directly on the high-road. Cayrol had handed over horse and gig to Jeantou's care and was walking back to the house when he encountered Fortunade.

"Nothing amiss, my girl?"

"No, Monsieur le Docteur. Mademoiselle is with Monsieur Favières."

Behind the curtains, in Jean's room, a lamp had just been lit, a yellow blossom in the violet dusk of the evening, and lo! the wintry landscape suddenly looked gloomier than ever. Still a gleam rose from the snow, throwing a weird reflected light over everything, while away to the west on the wooded slopes of the mountains a lurid rent showed up in the uniform grey of the sky, marking the spot where the sun had disappeared.

Fortunade asked stammeringly :

"And—and—he is doing well, young Veydrenne?"

Cayrol lost all patience.

"What the devil's that to you? D'you want the fellow for your lover? For God's sake, don't let me hear that brute's name again!"

"But——"

"He may die in his hole like a rat for me! His father set the dogs on me. If young Veydrenne trusts to the old man's nostrums, he'll be a lameter all his life,—and I shall be glad to see it, enormously glad! Ah! ha! I've been well paid out for my idiotic good-nature!"

"We must forgive such people, Monsieur Cayrol. They don't know—they distrust you. If it was explained to them that you really wish to do them good——"

"I don't wish to do them any good whatever! You are going back to the house?"

"No, Monsieur, I'm going away."

"Where to?"

"Home."

"Are not you having your dinner with Françoïnette? Denise has told you you may go?"

"No, Monsieur. I don't like to trouble her to ask, but as I have finished my work——"

"You may go when you like. Good-night."

The girl drew her shawl over her head, settled her feet in her sabots, and went her way.

How lonely it was! On one side rises the hill, terraced for cultivation and topped by a row of storm-writhen chestnuts. On the other descends the precipitous slope of the gorge, the heather looking black under patches of melting snow. At this spot the Monadouze tumbles over four successive falls with a terrific roar and a prodigious eddying of foaming waters; then, shooting over the boulders that have fallen into its bed, it dashes away in noisy rapids towards the dark *gours* (abysses)

of the hell's cauldron below.

On a projecting spur of rock is planted the cemetery, overhanging the cascades. Supporting walls keep the earth from slipping into the abyss, while at the point of the spur a gigantic walnut-tree seems to stand sentinel over the mournful little enclosure. The ground is bare about it even in summer, its chill shade killing all vegetable life, while in winter its leafless boughs form a black fretwork through which the landscape beyond shows as a pattern of blue and green fragments.

The Monadouze folk think twice, once night is fallen, about passing by this lonely graveyard and the little chapel whose doors are always shut overlooking it. It was there that "in former days" old Brandou encountered the "white beast," and that in times more ancient still the *bérou* (werewolf) used to lie in wait for belated revellers to spring on to their shoulders and ride them.

Fortunade, who has to pass that way every evening, does not feel over safe, despite her trust in Divine protection. Her feet carry her forward, but she shuts her eyes tight not to see the rusty iron gate open perhaps with a harsh grind of hinges, and the phantom walnut-tree bend over the abyss and fall, carrying with it graveyard mould and dead men's bones entangled in its roots . . . But here, at last, are the houses of Monadouze, the weaver's, old Buneil's, Mère Lionardoune's. Here is the church with its four bells of different sizes, visible through the four openings in the steeple. The beadle is at the door sweeping away the snow

from the steps.

Pigs nose about the village street, their foul smell mingling with the musty stench of the stable. They are friendly, impudent fellows, these Limousin porkers, dappled black and pink and looking as if they were hooded and breeched. Roaming free all day, they perform the office of scavengers, as Cayrol says, and at sunset each makes for his own sty.

There stands the inn, diffusing lamplight, a strong smell of frying and a clatter of voices. Pictures and picture postcards enliven the little windows, and behind the half-drawn curtain Fortunade can see the pots of geraniums which, come the spring, will be as gay in their greens and reds as a fashion plate.

She opens the door to find two men sitting drinking, a miller and an apple-merchant, who greet her amicably: "*Aducias, Fortunadoune.*" Little Marcellin is playing with a dog under the table, Madaloun, squatted before the hearth, is frying the *tourtaus* (black wheat pancakes), which send up an agreeable incense to greet grandfather Brandou's nostrils.

Maria Brandou, who is busy washing glasses in the scullery, hails her:

"Is that you, *filhota* (my girl)! What are you after?"

"I have come to put on my clogs. Mademoiselle sent me here on an errand—and my sabots hurt me."

"You are coming back?"

"Of course I must!"

"Would you like your sister to go with you?"

"It's not dark yet, and to-night they'll send someone to see me home."

Mère Brandou's maternal solicitude is satisfied. Inside, the apple-merchant and the miller are talking away, while their asses discuss a peck of oats in the stable. Outside stand the two *charretous* with their shafts in the air.

"The Curé at our place," observed the miller, "he was well thought on at first, but then it came in the fellow's noddle to write books. He'd make up stories for the youngsters out of the catechism and write it all down—*scrape, scrape, scrape* . . . Then he'd invite the neighbours: 'Sit you down there, Francelhou,' he'd say, and sing me that ballad you know, the *Paubra novia* (The Unhappy Bride)—and down with it all on paper—*scrape, scrape, scrape* . . ."

The apple-merchant contented himself with winking and slapping his forehead.

"Yes," the miller went on, "he was very cracked, our Curé was. But folks complained. Every man to his trade, say I. *I'm* a miller, I am, and I grind flour. You, lazy chap, you sell apples, eh? The Curé, they pay him to sing mass, marry folks, bury the dead, and teach the youngsters their catechism. Books, quotha; books are none of his business!"

The apple-merchant waxed facetious:

"What sort of business will their's be, these Curés, when 'separation' comes, eh?"

The miller replied with a coarse jest; but now old Père Brandou's voice struck in from the chimney-corner:

"Separation? You listen to me; you'll never see any such thing, my fine chap!"

"Eh? and why not, if government want it."

"Because there'd be no more Sunday then," vociferated the old fellow from amidst the fragrant smoke of the frying *tourtous*. "And what would us peasants do then? It's our diversion to meet our mates to crack a bottle and hear what's the news from the fairs. Well, we'd just have to live with our cows and our pigs, with never a soul to talk to. Separation, d'ye see, Miller, is all very well for the towns, but in the country parts—no, no, no, mate, it'll never do!"

The miller had been drinking a bit and was all for a joke:

"Ah, ha! you say so, Père Brandou, because you are in with the Curés, you are, and because your girl is going to turn nun. You don't want to see her lose her job."

"Fortunade turn nun!" broke in Mère Brandou indignantly; "why, you're drunk, my man. You mind your own concerns. My daughter will marry when I give the word. There's no lack of lovers, and she has a penny piece or two to start house-keeping decently. Give my girl and her money to a Convent? Not I, for sure!"

"Well, well!" put in Fortunade. "I'm off now."

Her mother raised no objection. It was not uncommon for workgirls to be kept busy late like this by customers in the neighbourhood.

On the little village green, beside the stone cross with the grape-vine carved on it, women were filling their buckets at the fountain. Twilight still lingered, and though the full moon was invisible, it was evid-

ently shining bright and glorious in the regions of the sky that are always unclouded, above the clouds. A faint glow of diffused light pierced the mass of vapour, while the reflection from the snow, which still lay in patches here and there, further helped to render the shape of things discernible.

The church-door stood open for the evening prayer, which in a few minutes, when the angelus had rung, would collect before the altar priest, beadle, three or four choir boys and a few old women. The dark, so sinister and suspect on the heathy plateaux of this witch-ridden Limousin region, the dark came softly into God's house and bore itself very humbly there. Sanctified by the scent of all the tapers, all the incense burnt there, it hovered round the holy-water vessels, but durst not yet envelop the bright and brilliant Virgin where she stood on her azure globe guarded by three flaming candles.

Fortunade knelt down and began to pray. Her sin weighed on her spirit like a physical pain,—a pain she had rarely felt since those days of anguish that had preceded her first Communion. Her conscience was very sensitive, and she thought herself very guilty. Still the purity of her intentions seemed some little excuse, and she reflected how the duty of charity takes precedence of all others and the saving of a lost soul may well redeem a falsehood.

Once more her simple soul, innocent of all theological subtleties, rebelled before the mystery of evil. How reconcile with the infinite goodness of

God the infinite pain of men? How endure, without a holy indignation, the spectacle of this pain? Good men, M. Cayrol for instance, and the Curé, who looked human misery in the face and did their best to relieve it, never seemed stirred from their personal composure. They stood by the bedside of dying men, they heard the sob of mothers and widows, and then habit soon soothed their compassion, and, satisfied with having done their duty, resigned to their impotency in face of these social and natural fatalities, they would go back home again—and forget.

But Fortunade could not forget. The soft Christian pity that was born in her heart at the tale of the sufferings of her Saviour was very different from the puling, cowardly, self-complacent passion that feeds on ready tears and fine phrases and mystic ecstasies. It became a conscious will, quick to embody itself in immediate action. In this Limousin peasant-girl, bodily so weak and so sad-hearted, lived again the soul of those virgin martyrs who overthrew idols and defied Roman proconsuls, the spirit of those rustic heroines who hearkened so devoutly to the voices and cast down the distaff to grasp the sword. But the voices that spoke to Fortunade ordained her, she believed in her humility, to no mighty missions; all they bade her do was to repair the injustice and the evil wrought by the accidents of nature and the selfishness of man. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to comfort the sorrower who weeps, to soften the hard heart that cannot weep, to be light in the darkness of

ark souls, speech to the dumb, strength to the
ruined and broken, guide to the lost and despair-
ing, the humble intermediary betwixt man who
forgets God and God who turns away his face from
man; to obey the command of the crucified Christ
that opened heaven to the good thief,—and to the
mad, perhaps! Ineffable temptation, holy madness!
Infinite hope! infatuation of a woman's whole in-
spiration, whole sensibility! Resist? . . . how
resist? . . . Reflect? . . . How reflect? . . .
It is God Himself speaks. It is He appoints her
her vocation of consoler, comforter. "Go there-
fore! hasten to thy brother who is in pain! Go
not to-morrow, but to-night!" . . . She shudders:
Ah! if they knew! ah! what would they think?
Did not M. Cayrol say I was mad and morbid with
displaced love? But they cannot read my heart,
Holy Virgin, Holy Mary!"

And now she is on her way under the slatey sky,
through the tall brown heather, along the hollow,
rippling lanes, between the slender birches and
dark pines. Hill rises behind hill; the far-off
loneliest loom dimly through the mist like a
flock of sheep. In a moment the dark closes in, a
wolf howls in the distance and the rising night-wind
brings a blast of cold from the snows of Auvergne
has swept over.

Fortunade presses on; fear would fain check her,
but her eagerness gives her wings. She passes by
the village and sets the dogs barking and the sheep
bleating. Lights appear on the uplands and the
old-world superstitions occur to the girl's mind,—

phantoms which an *Ave* drives away. A step! a shape moving among the bushes! Quick, Fortunade crosses herself and says a prayer. And now the low-lying houses and gnarled chestnuts of Le Chastang are in sight.

It is not a village like Monadouze, it can hardly be called even a hamlet,—just five or six low-browed hovels, indistinguishable in colour from mud and rock, hid away in a fold of the hills. The marshy soil is rank with rushes and reeking with fever, and a few gaunt pigs and skinny cows feed all day round the tumble-down walls. The stench of manure, stagnant water, dirty clothes, filthy stables, hangs heavy in the unhealthy air of the dell. Moreover it is as bad a place for its denizens' souls as it is for their bodies,—a spot that should be disinfected with copious holy water for the heinous sins its inhabitants have been guilty of generation after generation. Diligences stopped, travellers mishandled, shepherd girls violated, gendarmes stoned, rick-burnings; the Newgate calendar of Le Chastang is long and sinister!

The door of the Veydrenne hovel, half broken down at the bottom, shows a faint line of light from inside. A block of crumbling stone forms the threshold. The girl has not had time to knock before a furious barking breaks out.

"Who's there, who's there, eh?"

"It is I,—Fortunade Brandou."

"You!" cried old Veydrenne: "are you alone?"—and he peers out into the dark suspiciously.

"Yes, quite alone."

"What do you want?"

The girl points to her basket.

"I am bringing you——"

"Come in."

The mastiffs, great grey rough-coated brutes, cower away at a gesture from the old man and lie down sullenly before the fire, but their fierce eyes follow every movement of the intruder. The Roman *chalelh* (hand-lamp), shaped like a bird, hangs from the roof-beams, and its cotton wick, fed with rancid oil, burns with a feeble smoky flame. The floor is entirely unpaved, not even a layer of beaten earth, only the uneven, rugged rock. There is a bench before the table, a chest against the wall; here, guns suspended from hooks; there, strings of onions; in one corner a sack of chestnuts, a cracked kettle, a worm-eaten fox-skin, a collection of odd-looking miscellaneous rubbish.

Martial Veydrenne lies in the box-bed common to all peasants' cottages, with a rug of red serge stretched across. He wakes up and turns his face towards the girl; it has grown pale and thin and the chin is black with the unshaven beard. He asks:

"Why, what have they done to you?"

"Done to me? Nothing."

Whatever has she come for, if not to ask for something, payment for her trouble or help against someone? The young man cannot make it out. The father has sat down in a chair and manifests no more curiosity. His enormous bristling beard and bushy whiskers give him the look of a human wild beast.

Fortunade feels helpless and alone, at the mercy of these two rough fellows she knows nothing of,—save their wretchedness and brutality. After them, why Fauche, Buneil, Chabrillat even, seem civilized, Christian folk !

Stepping up to the bed :

“ You’re not worse, Veydrenne ? ” she asks. ‘ Once you’ve looked after a body, you know, one doesn’t like to hear no news at all how they’re getting on. So I’ve come, you can see for yourself.’

“ You are very good, Fortunade. Do sit down.”

But where was she to sit ?

“ Father, give the child the chair, and hot up some wine. You must drink a sup of hot wine, my ass, you look so pale.”

The old man got up, hunted out a bottle and an earthenware pipkin. Fortunade was embarrassed, but durst not decline the wine, which she did not want. She knew what was required of her by the laws of rustic politeness.

Then, installed in her chair, she asked :

“ Perhaps there’s something you want ?—medicines, linen ? ”

“ Oh ! yes, there’s things I want ; but there, I can do without. Besides, there’s father. He knows the good herbs and the words to say. Oh ! he has cured heaps of folks in former days ! Why, they’d come all the way from Chamberet and from Argentat es, and from the ends of the Department to see him, they would ! Bad spleen, bad lungs, children bewitched, water on the belly,—father had secrets or everything. Look you, this very evening he has

charmed away my fever! If ever you are ill you must send for him,—without a word to anyone. He'll come, never fear, for you,—for you and nobody else. But not a soul must know. If the doctor heard of it, father would be hauled up and fined. The doctor, indeed! curse the doctor!" and he swore a horrid oath.

"What did he come here spying round for? I soon showed him the door. He's taken all father's customers, he has, by his lies and nasty ways."

"You're talking too much, Martial Veydrenne. Your fever's not *charmed* clean away, don't think it. So hold your tongue. You, Père Veydrenne, you tell him to stop talking!"

The *metje* shook his head, and his toothless jaws growled out some word in patois through the matted forest of his unkempt beard. Once he had been a personage, a power in the land. But since the days, years ago, when he had extinguished his forge and dropped his trade as a wizard and bone-setter, his brain had grown sluggish and his tongue slow in the loneliness of his life.

Fortunade spoke more confidently :

"There, you are calmer. Now tell me quite quietly. Does your leg hurt you?"

"Look."

He made as if to throw back the coverlet; then thought better of it, as if, for the first time in his life, he felt a sense of shame in presence of a woman.

"No, no! it's not worth the trouble—it's not a pretty sight."

"You ought by rights to have gone to the hospital.

You are so ill lodged, and your bed is so uncomfortable. And your father has lost his powers."

Veydrenne shook his head. The girl came closer, and her cool hand stroked the man's bony, broad-tipped fingers; she smoothed the creases of the counterpane and re-arranged the cushion which served as a pillow.

"Poor fellow!" she murmured.

She knows no secrets to cure disease; all she brings Veydrenne is the consolation of her presence, her brave heart and her pity. But, better than the best of doctors and spell-mongers, her smile *charms* away his fever.

The injured man cannot fathom the motive that has brought her, but her visit flatters his vanity, perhaps stirs his sensibility, and awakes what vague love of his kind is still left in him. Like a true savage, he has a savage's rudimentary sense of hospitality, and he is determined the girl shall not go away without having eaten and drunk with him, without having sealed by a meal in common a sort of compact, a half-defined treaty of alliance.

He muttered:

"Stay a moment. You will catch your death, if you go away again without warming yourself. The wine is hot; drink some."

The girl touched the cup the old man handed her with her lips. A wave of heat rose to her brain; her cheeks grew hot as a loaf just drawn from the oven; her dark eyes were misty and her sight indistinct.

"It is very strong, your wine is. It burns!"

"It will do you good. I say, will you come again?"

"Yes, I will, if you will let me nurse you, Martial Veydrenne, and if you don't speak ill of my friends. It angers me ! you ought to see that."

"I have no wish to annoy you."

"Well, good-night !"

"Good-night. Father, see her home."

"No, no. I am not a bit afraid."

"See her home, father. The roads are none too safe. And she's such a child."

"I can trust God ; He is the Master."

"Well, if that's your idea ; we all think differently. I don't make much of God, you know that."

So here she is alone again, in the dark night, now darker than ever, old Veydrenne having parted from her at the crossroads. Suddenly her heart fails her, and her knees tremble under her.

She sees once more the Veydrennes' lair, the taciturn *metje*, the dogs, the smoky lamp, and the sick man on the straw mattress. Terror, disgust, an unavowed feeling of maiden modesty, remorse for the lie she has told, ah ! what torments Fortunade is suffering !

"What would my mother say, and Mademoiselle Denise, and Monsieur Cayrol ?"

She thinks how horrid Veydrenne is.

"But then he is so unhappy ! He should have someone very good to talk to him very gently and sensibly and kindly, as the missionaries do to the heathen and the Chinese. Perhaps that would change him."

And again the entrancing thought :

"What a glorious thing to save this reprobate soul !"

CHAPTER VIII

HEAVY snow-storms marred the end of February; then the temperature fell, and for two tedious weeks hills and valleys disappeared amid the lashing rain of an unceasing downpour. But spring showers are the ploughman's friend, softening the hard clods and enticing the first tender shoots of the autumn wheat to show their brilliant green in the rich brown furrows. The buds were hard and swollen; the pear-trees announced an abundance of white blossom ready to appear at the first glint of sunshine. Girls out with the sheep had heard the cuckoo; others had seen morels in the hollow of the low-lying meadows. Winter was weeping to die; spring was weeping in the travail of new birth.

The life of the fields went on, stubborn and patient as ever, under the welcome downpour; but all the usual village activity seemed benumbed and to have cowered away into the houses, where the lamps were lit early, as if it were still midwinter, for so overcast was the sky with heavy clouds the days gave no visible sign of lengthening. Gathering by twos and threes, the goodwives grumbled together at the sad consumption of oil and candle and the im-

possibility of drying clothes. The smallest noise in the street was an event.

At regular intervals the monotony was relieved by the arrival of the butcher from Corrèze, the baker, the postman, Marcelline from the Curé's, Françounette from the Cayrols'. The last-named lingered a little for a gossip.

"Hullo! good-day, Françounette! Are you off to Mère Brandou's then? How's your Parisian getting on?"

"Just the same as ever."

"And your young lady? Why, nobody ever sees her these times. She's scared of the rain, I suppose. Last year she could come along all right with her hood and her clogs, to have a bit of talk with the school-teacher or the post-mistress."

"She has no time to spare now for a walk, poor girl,—no, not for half an hour. He's for all the world like a spoilt child, yon Parisian! There's naught too good for him in the house nowadays."

But the women protested:

"*Té! té!* if he pays for it, where's the harm? They do say he's very rich."

"Rich?" cried Françounette; "Lord! I should think he *was* rich. His table's just packed with scents in twisty bottles with silver stoppers. And his linen, my word! the fineness of it, the beauty of it! Rich, indeed!"

"For all his riches, I tell you I'd rather be in my skin than his. They must be making a fine penny, those Cayrols, eh? Yes, and suppose the Parisian put the doctor's girl down in his will, out of gratitude!"

"No, don't say that!" objected the old servant, half shocked. "For sure, he might do worse, he might! But Mademoiselle doesn't nurse him for love of his money."

"Nor yet for love of him, eh?"

"Lord! woman, you've never seen him!"

"Then it's all for love of God she does it?"

"She's no great one for piety, isn't Mademoiselle Denise; you know that as well as I do. But then, it's all nonsense we're talking, my dears. Good-bye, I must be getting back home."

"Good-bye, Françoquette."

Her head muffled in a white cap, her round shoulders enveloped in a knitted tippet, her coarse blue stockings showing below a black petticoat, the old woman trudged away, her sabots click-clacking as she went. Now she is in front of the post-office. *Tap! tap!* then when the curtain goes up, two more discreet knocks at the window-pane. The post-mistress nods as much as to say "Stop a bit!" and the window half opens:

"How is Denise?"

"Very well, but so busy, so busy, poor young lady!"

"And the young man?"

"He's in God's keeping. One day worse, next day better."

"It's very sad. Denise must find it wearisome."

"It's not gay for her, for sure."

"Good-night, Françoquette."

"Good-bye, Mademoiselle Muret."

When evening came, it was Fortunade's turn to hear the tap-tap of knuckles at the window-pane and

o satisfy the gossips' curiosity. She was closely questioned :

"Was the Parisian a good-looking lad? Had he relations? Did the doctor treat him any way differently from us poor folks?" The seamstress answered gently :

"I don't know. I never see him."

She divided her week between the Cayrols' house and the Château, but she appeared to take no cognizance of places or people, whether from inborn discretion or because she lived a purely introspective life, entirely absorbed in prayer and meditation. Her exaggerated piety was as ardent as ever; but nevertheless,—was it the result of the doctor's wise prescriptions, or the effect of a gradual development of the girl's nature?—Fortunade began to grow stronger and rosy-cheeked and smiling; he seemed better balanced in mind and altogether happier. Her mother put it down to the Peruvian bark and the pills, but the girl declared all her sickness that winter came of the dread of marriage, and he had got well directly they stopped talking of the Lionassou match.

This was also Doctor Cayrol's view. He advocated marriage for young folks, but not forced marriage, acquiesced in against the grain. He would joke Mère Brandousometimes, insinuating that Fortunade was so much better now because she had fallen in love. But the landlady only threw up her arms in vehement protest :

"And who with, my dear Monsieur? She never sees a soul; she hates dancing and fine clothes, and

always bursts into tears when she mentions her beloved Convent. No, no! she never cared a straw for Lionassou, the girl didn't! She was afraid she should force her to marry. Maybe, it's true enough she got well when that fear was removed. E love? not a bit of it! A minx who goes to sacrament every Sunday!"

"Then Monsieur le Curé knows what's what better than you do, mother! That would make me feel small, if I were in your shoes."

"Does a body ever know her own children Monsieur le Docteur? Your fine Mademoiselle Denise, who is so good and so clever, do you know her."

"Egad! she keeps no confessor, does Denise I'm bound to be her friend."

Mère Brandou shook her dark head, flat bandeau and round net and all:

"Parents are parents, mind you, not friends. Children, Monsieur le Docteur, trust me, children are all just vexation of spirit. Look at my Fortunade! with her piety, she's given me more anxiety than all her younger sister's flightiness. That Madaloun, what a girl! fifteen, and she dreams of nothing but dances. But you, you're the lucky one. Mademoiselle Denise, an angel of light, a vision of beauty! and so clever! Why, they say she's a perfect Sister of Charity for your boarder (Her little eyes glittered with the keenest curiosity). "He's doing better, your young man?"

"He will be up and about soon."

"Is it possible? How clever you are, Monsieur Cayrol!"

Jean Favières got up, for the first time, on the eve of the day his mother was expected. It was one of those March days when the mildness of spring announces itself with unforeseen suddenness and the sun shines gloriously in through the curtains, so that the girls, tired of sewing, with drooping temples and dazzled eyes, neglect to throw a fresh log on the dying fire.

Françounette had helped Jean to dress, with a fine display of motherliness. When that operation was completed, the young man stood leaning on the back of an armchair, his legs bending under him. Then the old servant called: "Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle!" and Denise was at last allowed to enter.

She could not restrain a cry. What an alteration! She hardly knew him. She would never again dare to speak to him as an elder sister does to a brother. Why, he had grown taller, surely?

He burst out laughing, and owned he seemed abnormally long and slender in his clothes that hung loose about his limbs.

"Mother will think me hideous."

"She will be only too happy to see you up! If she had come last month she would have been unfavourably impressed."

"Still, I would rather she *had* come last month. But her boy had the measles, and Madame Fabre is not the woman to leave her son's bedside lightly."

He always said "her son" instead of "my brother," and Denise understood the painful jealousy he could not help betraying whenever he alluded to his mother's second husband and the child who had

supplanted him.

"Sit down by the window."

"I feel quite dizzy. Oh! how weak I am on my legs!"

"To-morrow," Françoünette assured him, "you'll be more up to the mark. Look, here's a cushion for your shoulders, and a rug to wrap round your legs."

Denise placed a light table at the young man's elbow, and on it a packet of papers and books M. Lapeyrie had sent, a glass of orangeade and a sugar-basin.

Jean proceeded to button his swanskin jacket and tie the cravat that masked the outstanding tendons of the wasted neck. The fatigue of this first getting up was an agreeable experience, and he noted gratefully the solicitude of the two women, who seemed to exist only to nurse and distract and wait upon him. So cheerfully did they perform their task that Jean Favières would sometimes tell himself:

"They are sick nurses by natural vocation, the same as they would be mothers. My sickroom is their kingdom, and my weakness helps them to enjoy the bliss of being strong. They forget I am twenty-three; I become a child again to let myself be spoiled by them;" and he thought, in his simple selfishness: "It is lucky there are still such women left. I imagined the species was extinct."

He had reason to think so, having, as a matter of fact, never known any but "light women," companions of a day, delighted with a jewel or a kiss. The selfishness of these charming creatures never troubled him in those old days! He only asked of them what he promised them, pretty words, pretty

ways, and when the inevitable parting came, some little flattering pretence of regret.

Then, later, he had loved Juliette Rémond, a vain, sensual coward. But no sooner were dark days come than the shadow of death had put to flight both comrades and mistress. Then Jean had felt a poignant craving for women's tenderness of another sort, the sort that has nothing to do with love, the tenderness of a mother or sister, the tenderness that is blind to physical ugliness, that knows no repulsion of disgust, and flows forth from the depths of a woman's heart as the milk does from her bosom.

Installed between Denise and Cayrol, treated by them as a brother and a son, Jean Favières was overjoyed at the discovery of what family intimacy really meant,—two beings who lived for each other and both lived for others, who supplied the lack of fortune, high æsthetic culture and the pleasures of society by the delights of mutual devotion and a reasoned determination to create and preserve their own happiness. The close community of ideas, often the community of action, existing between them minimised the differences of age and sex. Father and daughter were pre-eminently friends. Day by day Jean saw in bolder relief, more clearly defined and more fascinating, these two delightful figures, always present in his thoughts as at his bedside, pictures of manly kind-heartedness and feminine tenderness. In contact with them he became simple and unsullied again; he forgot his morbid, uneasy cravings, his wistful regrets, which his pride only half succeeded in subduing; without an effort he

recovered the generous impulses of his true nature.

Denise had pictured Madame Fabre to herself as a cold, rather hard personage ; the woman,—the young woman—whom she welcomed at the Mondouze railway-station disconcerted her just at first by her air and dress and way of speaking.

Nature and race had created her beautiful, this Arlésienne with the straight profile, the curved mouth, the great, dreamy eyes that seemed so deep and were merely empty ; but Madame Fabre had made herself pretty, correcting the majesty of the original type by becoming details of adornment. She wore her hair in graceful coils ; it was naturally wavy, and unfastened would have rolled over her hips in a great dark river. A discreet touch of rouge heightened the pink of the cheeks, which were unwrinkled, for all her forty years and more, while her complexion still kept the polish and delicate pallor of marble. Then when Madame Fabre removed her long walking jacket, the suppleness of the waist, quite loosely confined, showed how a splendid figure had been preserved intact by an unbroken practice of gymnastics, massage and rigorous hygiene.

All her life she had marched proudly over the desires of men, as on a purple carpet she hardly deigned to see. Careful of her beauty, neither sensual nor fanciful, she had remained virtuous out of sheer indifference. In her way she had loved her husband and son, because they were there ; she still loved the husband and son who were there—but it was no longer the same thing.

She inquired after Jean's state of health with very proper solicitude, and declared she had good hopes of his recovery. Presently Denise and Cayrol left her alone with the young man. When Denise came to fetch Madame Fabre to déjeuner, mother and son were sitting hand in hand and talking almost merrily. Already the agitation of meeting had subsided.

For two days Madame Fabre occupied Denise's room, which she littered with a profusion of scent-bottles, brushes and dainty underclothing. She inspected garden and village with a pretty affectation of simple enjoyment, and even went down to see the waterfalls. She said everything was: "Charming; oh! charming!"

In the afternoon she would sit in the white room and manicure her hands with loving care, while Jean looked admiringly at the little ivory instruments, the dainty manipulations, the glint of the light falling on the delicate nails that grew as pink and pretty as living sea-shells.

He said to her once:

"Ah! mother, you are too handsome. Why are you so fascinating? I would rather you——"

He did not complete the sentence. Madame Fabre replied:

"I do not paint; I do not tight-lace; I am not made up at all. If I am not plain, it's because nature made me as I am."

She put a dab of "coral red" on her left thumb, and said in her composed voice:

"My husband says the same. He married me because I was pretty, and now he is sorry I don't

age more quickly."

"He does the aging for you!" laughed Jean but she failed to understand his drift.

Denise, however, who was making the tea, had overheard the conversation, and *she* understood what chagrin Jean had suffered by reason of his mother being too fascinating, as another man suffers for a woman. If she had been plain she would never have married M. Fabre, and might perhaps have adored her son.

And if she spoke with a shrinking pride of this second boy who had been born to her, it was because the maternal instinct blossomed late, this the glorious twilight of her youth.

Madame Fabre had promised to stay a week at Monadouze. Three days after her arrival she announced her departure, and Jean made no urgent effort to detain her.

"We shall see each other again before long," she said; "you will be a welcome guest whenever you like to come to us."

He made a promise to pay her a visit in the autumn.

She went as she had come, charming, affable, smiling, after presenting Mademoiselle Cayrol with a piece of jewellery, an antique brooch of marcasite.

Her conscience was at peace; she had fulfilled her duties as a mother.

Denise left the windows of her room open in the evening to let the perfume of "Royal vervain" escape. She felt relieved, almost joyful . . .

But Jean was sad at heart.

CHAPTER IX

THE first violets of the year were brought in one morning by Fortunade.

"I did not gather them myself," she exclaimed, when Jean thanked her. "Someone gave me them. They come from Le Chastang."

She hesitated, fearing she had said too much; then she added boldly:

"It was young Veydrenne."

"You see something of him again then?" asked Denise.

"When he goes our way, past the house, he drops in."

"And he drinks?"

"Why, of course; but he pays."

"Where does he get the money?"

"It's his own. Don't you know he works now?"

A flush of pride rose to the girl's cheeks.

"Yes, he's at work—with some woodcutters from Chadan. And I thought, if you would speak to Madame la Baronne, she would give him regular jobs out of compliment to you. He is a strong chap, Veydrenne."

"But he bears a bad reputation."

"But if he wants to be an honest man again?"

"It does not seem likely!" put in Jean.

Denise shook her head :

"I have my fears, my poor Fortunade."

The girl looked at the two young people out of her glorious eyes, in which burned a sombre flame.

"You give medicines to sick people, and when they begin to get well, you are encouraged and confident. Well, I am confident he will turn out well, will Veydrenne. He is trying to reform. We must not discourage him."

"Very well, I will speak to Madame la Baronne. Only be careful, my poor girl."

"What of? It seems you don't understand me one bit! You imagine I want the man for my beau! No, you can't possibly think that, Mademoiselle Denise, you, of all people!"

"Beware of him, even if you can trust yourself."

"He has never said a bad word to me. If even he dared, I should never speak to him again. But there, he's not such a fool as all that!"

Fortunade began to cry, and to comfort her Denise promised to go to Saint-Dumine at an early date.

She kept her promise the very next day.

To reach the Château she had to pass through Monadouze and turn off behind the church along a rough, pebbly trackway between high banks. Close by thundered the torrent, pouring under a wooden bridge. In the yard of the mill, the miller Chauze, a cousin of the Veydrennes, a man suspected of having the "evil eye," was loading up sacks of flour on a *charretou*.

After crossing the torrent, Denise took the path along the heather-clad hillside. The chestnuts clinging to the slope were still leafless. Far below, in the narrow gorge, the water ran white with foam, its current continually broken by fallen boulders, while above rose a towering wall of granite topped by a jagged line of rocky pinnacles that stood out against the overcast sky.

At last the Château came in sight, with its enormous mansard roof, its single storey and arched French windows in the style of the Regency. A balustraded terrace ran along the west front, the other façade, which was less ornate, overlooking the offices and stables.

Round the house the dark forest-trees of the park were ranged in formal vistas. An artificial lake some way off reflected the leaden sky. Beneath the trees the ground-ivy spread a carpet of green, and a few periwinkles, some white, some blue, were beginning to peep from amid their pointed leaves, which had survived the winter.

It was long since Denise had had so distressing a walk. The exercise fatigued her somewhat, and both in head and limbs she felt a touch of the feverishness that comes with the approach of spring. Her skirt of grey cashmere, which she was too tired to hold up, dragged with a soft rustle over the gravel of the avenues. Her straw-coloured veil, which she had thrown back between the two pheasant's wings that ornamented her hat, fanned her neck softly.

How lonely it was! How everything seemed

asleep ! Not a servant to be seen ; the inside shutters standing half open.

Suddenly a little dog barked, and a maid opened the glass door of the entrance-hall, where stags' antlers and boars' heads were ranged alternately with dark family portraits.

"Madame la Baronne is in the drawing-room with Madame la Comtesse de Salices. I will tell her Mademoiselle is here. Madame la Baronne will be so pleased !"

The Comtesse de Salices ! Yes, Denise remembered this cousin of Madame de Saint-Dumine's, who used to come on a visit to the Limousin every four or five years, and scandalized the peasants with her dyed hair, her shrill voice and the brilliant rouge on her old cheeks. Formerly a maid-of-honour in the Imperial Court, she had played her part at Compiègne in the tableaux vivants. She had been handsome, dashing, admired and loved. And she had her story, which Denise only imperfectly knew.

Madame de Saint-Dumine, now seventy-five and a confirmed invalid, had turned pious in face of approaching death ; but she could not resist the charm of this cousin, a woman of her own age, who was still keen after excitement and novelty, pleasure-loving and always full of romantic memories of old loves and lovers. The aged sinner was a comfort to the aged saint, her whimsicalities and cheerful talk almost persuading the latter that they were still young things, both of them, and the end was far off.

The semi-darkness of the drawing-room surprised Denise on her first entrance. Madame de Saint-Dumine was by herself, wrapped in a knitted shawl, reclining, rather than sitting, on a hideous sofa of black wood covered in red brocade. Voluminous curtains, much betasseled and befringed, hanging from elaborate, heavily-gilded poles, half blocked the three windows, so that, in the gloom two things only showed up with any distinctness,—the great lustre with its bronze chains and crystal pendants, and on the chimney-piece a bust representing Madame de Saint-Dumine in the first bloom of youth,—the hair in ringlets, the face a perfect oval, proud, smiling lips, superb sloping shoulders.

Denise all but upset a lacquer table supporting a basket of ornamental leather-work full of dried grasses and ferns. Then a soft, mumbling voice, that bespoke a toothless mouth, rose plaintively :

“You cannot see very well, can you, my dear? My poor eyes prefer the dusk. Mind the armchair. There, you can find your way now! I thought I was never going to see you again.”

“I have so little free time, Madame de Saint-Dumine; you must excuse me.”

“Yes, yes, you are sick-nurse now. How disagreeable for you! Sick people are just as odious as old people.”

A little cold, clammy hand was held out, and a tiny face, colourless and all but featureless,—the shadow of a shadow!—peered from out the heap of shawls. The Baronne had the repulsive pallor of those grubs one discovers in the cracks of a tree’s

bark, hid away under the leaves. Her black lace cap was perched on top of an erection of false grey hair. Her heavy lids drooped over two dull, fishy eyes. Dieted on milk, her figure wasted to the size of a child's, sight and hearing failing, she lived on, while her feeble limbs seemed to shrink together the better to preserve and guard the faint spark of life that still flickered within her.

"Sick people are odious, I quite agree!" declared Madame de Salices, who sailed into the room at that moment, pitching heavily as she steered among the perilous reefs of furniture. "As for old people, they ought to forget their age and make others forget it. Don't talk to me of those old fossils who let themselves be horrible to look at and insupportable to hear, and who poison young folks' lives for them, because, forsooth, they are seventy-five! A fine thing that to boast of, to be sure! I am seventy-five, and I am not the least proud of it."

"You are so young in spirit, so young in mind!" replied Denise graciously.

Madame de Salices began to laugh.

"My stomach is young, my nerves are young, that's the whole secret! I hate doctors and drugs; I have no notion of time, and I am so pleased to be alive, that upon my word! I am not at all sure I shall ever die. I am not a bit afraid of death, and I never think of it except to heighten my zest in life. You look shocked, Denise, my pretty! You think I am an old mad-woman! No, my girl, on the contrary, I am a shining example of true common sense. Copy me later on, if you can;

and while you are young make all the use ever you can of your youth."

Madame de Saint-Dumine observed :

"Mademoiselle Cayrol is a very simple and serious-minded person."

"But she is not thirty yet, and she is pretty. By-the-bye, child, *are* you pretty? You gave promise of good looks. Come near the window, and let me feast my eyes. Come along! . . . No, you are not pretty, but you could be, if you chose. You don't know how. You don't take care of your complexion. Your hair is badly done. You should think more of your looks. The open air ruins the skin, and gold hair turns chestnut. You ought to wash yours in camomile-water. And never use soap for the face."

"Thank you for your good advice," laughed Denise. "I never do use soap for my face; but I have no wish to change the colour of my hair. It must be as God wills. At Monadouze nobody ever looks at it."

She was thinking how hideous the Comtesse's hair was, with its coarse henna red!

Madame de Salices, with her huge, full-moon face, her bloated cheeks and heavily-pouched eyes, showed no wrinkles but such as come of laughing and self-indulgence. No tears had ever ploughed on her flabby countenance the pathetic double furrow that marks the noble, matronly face of the Madonna in so many famous pictures of the *Descent from the Cross*. The Comtesse cared nothing about commanding respect, and it was a less serious

feeling that was inspired in men's minds by the antique ruin of her face, bedaubed with gaudy colours.

"She is like," so Doctor Cayrol had declared one day, "she is like an old Indian brave, who no longer goes on the war-path, but who wears his war-paint still."

But to many this berouged old woman, this light-o'-love Jezebel of a bygone day, was even more alarming than ridiculous. Her whole personality moved the imagination, and Denise found herself marvelling at her much as the rising generation of girls in 1825 must have looked wonderingly at the great ladies of fifty-five and sixty who came back after the emigration, with the powder and rouge, the long waists and puffed petticoats, and the outspoken talk of their own young days.

Madame de Salices had her dresses made in Paris according to the latest mode; yet on her they somehow assumed an old-world look, because her gestures, her way of walking, her carriage of the body had all been learned in former days so as to set off quite another fashion of clothes. The corset of the period, large-bosomed, short-waisted, broad-hipped, had definitely imposed its lines on the shape it had moulded for so many years. Madame de Salices wore massive brooches, many bracelets and a large chignon. Her skirt was voluminous and beflounced and occupied an enormous space all round its wearer.

The Comtesse kept to the curt and commodious philosophy of the Second Empire. In a new world,

at once more refined and more brutal than her own, she still found endless amusement in making fun of the intellectuals and neuropaths who between them represented in her eyes the rising generation of women. A Catholic nominally, an Epicurean by temperament, she boldly faced the world of to-day with her careless optimism, her flawless health and a certain frivolity of mind which will not suffer the thoughts to dwell on serious subjects. She declared herself a very happy woman.

The younger women sought her society, while she herself enjoyed the savour of their youth, rejoiced in their beauty, and was always ready to play the confidante. On the contrary, married women of a maturer age gave her the cold shoulder.

"Suppose you leave Monadouze, my dear, and go to live in a large town, say Paris. Suppose a young man singles you out. The thing's perfectly possible! Well, won't you be dreadfully sorry to have destroyed your complexion and ruined your hair? Believe me,—I speak from experience,—merit without beauty runs a great risk of being passed over. Look pretty, and then they will do justice to your other qualities."

"The fact is, I have no intention of leaving Monadouze, and I don't think I shall ever marry."

"Well, look pretty, on the chance! But you must *not* stay on in this hole, dear child; it would be a sin. It would be too grievous to grow old,—to grow old without having been young! What a prospect to resign yourself to! Don't do it,

Mademoiselle Cayrol! Jeanne, my dear, we must save the girl! We must find her a good husband! Surely they are not *all* yokels, *all* fools, in your Limousin?"

"You see I have no dot," the girl remarked quietly. "And then, we see no society."

"You have never had a proposal?"

"Never."

"It's past believing!—And you are happy?"

"Very happy."

Madame de Saint-Dumine here lifted up her plaintive voice to suggest tea. The Comtesse rang the bell, while Denise, who found the conversation rather irritating, proffered her request and said what she could for Veydrenne.

"I will do whatever you wish," the Baronne told her. "The factor is coming to-morrow, and I will speak to him. Let Martial Veydrenne know we will take him on on trial."

Denise thanked her hostess, and after the tea was brought in, the conversation fell on the doctor, and Jean, and the system of diet the Comtesse had adopted. Presently Mademoiselle Cayrol took her leave.

She went down the same rocky path, under the chestnuts. It was near four o'clock, and the sun was trying to pierce through the thinner strata of clouds, and the blue sky appeared here and there where the warm wind had dispersed the mists.

The cuckoo repeated over and over its questioning, melancholy note, and for the first time since last year Denise heard the hoarse cry of the

wild dove. The mildness in the air, the scents of the germinating earth, the airy bird-calls that plainly meant one thing and one thing only, troubled Denise's senses to the verge of sadness. Her visit to the Château had left her with an odd feeling of unrest, of dissatisfaction. Madame de Salices had talked in the same strain as M. Lapeyrie had once before, and almost in the same words.

This attitude of compassion, with a touch of curiosity, was getting to irritate and annoy her.

"I wish they would leave me in peace! I don't need a husband to be happy, and least of all a husband like such a one and such a one"—and she pictured to herself the men who had come into her ken hitherto,—bourgeois of a small town, country squireens, worthy people who loved good cheer and the peaceful monotony of an uneventful existence, whose life was entirely taken up with external, material things. The more intelligent expended their energy in the petty struggles of local politics, strove to round off their little properties, and sometimes rode an innocent hobby,—archæology or statistics. Incapable of a single original thought, they held safe opinions on all subjects, opinions that chimed in with their worldly interests and which they expressed in phrases learnt by heart,—and not always understood.

They all thought highly of Doctor Cayrol and his daughter, but they still held to old provincial prejudices anent youth and beauty in women, and Denise, at twenty-seven, and without a fortune, did not strike them as a "marriageable young lady."

None of them had ever paid her court, for she overawed the less refined, and not one of them had ever stirred her feelings.

At sixteen she had dreamed of a lover, a husband, not especially rich or handsome, but noble-looking and generous-hearted, very different from any of the men she knew. For several years she had hoped and waited, and when he never came she fell into the habit of thinking of him as of one dead, sadly, but without a trace of bitterness.

Never had she known the sensation that a man was nursing a covert passion for her beauty, never heard a lover's confession, never suspected any power of fascination in herself. Remote from the exciting whirl of worldly society, untouched by the voluptuous suggestions of literature and music, her senses were still asleep.

Yonder, in the woods of Saint-Dumine, the doves were calling to one another, craving to mate and nest; and deeper yet than the impulse to love, the overmastering maternal instinct awoke again after years of indifference in Denise's maiden bosom. She thought of the magnificent physical development, the abounding force and vigour that made her no doll for an artist to admire, no toy for a lover to play with, but a type of perfect womanhood, a worthy mother of men. A stalwart race might have sprung from her untainted blood, have drunk life from her shapely breasts. And yet this beautiful body, so nobly planned, so amply framed, so rich in sap, was to wither away in barrenness, like the puling body of a sickly nun!

"I shall die, all of me, and all mine with me. I shall not hand on the flame I have received. I shall never know the sacred pangs of a mother and her joy,—the joy men cannot imagine, but which I guessed so well when I was a young girl. Ah! the sweet, penetrating warmth of the little body a young mother clasps in her arms! The upward, fixed look of the new-born babe's eyes as it hangs at the breast and sees its mother's face like the sky overhead! All these wondrous emotions I shall never feel. No, I shall never fulfil my destiny as a woman!"

The tears ran down her cheeks. It was so seldom Denise wept she was ashamed of her weakness.

"Where are my thoughts flying? I am mad, surely. I have renounced this happiness. What am I saying? I have not had to renounce it; I have never had the chance of refusing it. My father's love, my humble friends' affection, the hope of doing a little good unostentatiously, that is all I can claim in this world. In after years, when I am left alone and growing old, I will adopt a little child, perhaps——"

This dream, which she had cherished sometimes, without ever speaking of it, restored her to something like calmness. She wiped her eyes and pursued her way homewards.

CHAPTER X

SO the days dragged on heavily ; but afterwards the improvement in Jean's health continued steadily and was so rapid that he was able to get up, go down into the garden again and even to take drives in the country. The Baronne de Saint-Dumine lent an old-fashioned little basket-carriage, a very light vehicle with an apron and hood. Jean was buried under goat-skin rugs, and sometimes Denise, sometimes the doctor himself, would drive him about the environs of Monadouze.

The days were lengthening, and the landscape changing hue. The ruddy purples of winter were gone ; the deep blues of summer not yet come. Delicate reds, greyish yellows clothed the distances, with broad spaces of a faint, sharp green. The birches, the leafless poplars left visible through the lacework of their slender twigs the smallest details of the countryside, which lay laughing in the spring sunshine, weeping under the passing shower, basking in the genial warmth without shade or vapour or mystery, naked and innocent as a young child.

When the doctor was detained by professional duties, Denise and Jean would set off after breakfast and get back before dusk. The basket-carriage

really very much the shape of a basket, just held the two of them. Denise held the reins tight on the steep hills, looking straight before her, her eyes fixed on the windings of the road and the pony's ears. With her plaid the colour of a mossy tree-trunk, her feathered toque, her braided hair that lay close on the neck and turned a tawny gold in the sun, like an autumn branch, she seemed a Dryad escaped from an old oak-tree, her head crowned with living leafage and a live bird.

Her talk was of the country she loved and the labours of the field, of animals and plants, all of which she called by their names. Jean Favières, city-born and bred within the narrow confines of a Lycée, had spent his later leisure in roaming about those districts of Europe that are exploited for tourists and disfigured by hotels. He had paid more attention to paintings of landscape than to actual landscapes, and his ignorance of natural objects betrayed itself every other minute.

Denise had scant book-learning, but she now became Jean's guide through the realms of Nature, which he learned to appreciate through her eyes. Bathed in air and light, before the far-reaching horizons that prompt the imagination to soar, amid the unceasing energy of living germs, springing, growing, withering, he seemed to see in visible, tangible activity those laws of the universe he had read about in books, but which hitherto had been mere abstractions to his mind. Passively he surrendered himself to these impressions, and won an inkling of the pantheist's placid serenity, the peace

that arises from no personal hope or expectation, n affectionate trust in a loving Father, but rather from a perfect acquiescence of the whole being in the eternal order of the universe.

An inkling only, for this peace is vouchsafed in its fulness to but a few elect spirits.

Jean Favières was too young, he had too many unappeased longings, too many unsatisfied curiosities. He was one of those who cannot bear the thought of suffering, the thought of death, who would fain project their being in space and time, absorb the world in themselves.

But any idea of calamity and death was far from his thoughts on these golden afternoons when he participated in the joy of the new-born year.

He saw the lakes of Saint-Dumine, the plateaux of Brach, Chadan and the Habitarelle. The winding valleys, under the tender sky, in the pellucid air lay blue between the purple hills, and the light fell transcendently, divinely clear on the world as on the iridescent globe of a pearl. In the ravines the dwarf oaks still kept their coppery foliage; the willows striped the meadows with tints of ochre and orange; only the grass was green, bespangled with downy cowslips, while amid the brown branches springtide leapt, wild and free, with the russet-coated woodland squirrels.

Jean soon came to love it passionately, this land of the Limousin. No other, save antique Brittany, bears such an impress of the centuries on its rocks. It has still its sacred springs, its pagan rites, its processions mimicking the phases of

the moon in the cycle of the twelve months. Its herdsmen, charmers of wolves to this day, speak still the tongue of Bertran de Born and Bernard de Ventadour. Its ploughmen, at work in some "Cæsar's camp," sometimes turn up with their share a Roman suit of mail, a Legionary's helmet, an eagle of rusted bronze. In the caves of its hill-sides are found rocks graven with pictures of the mammoth and bones of men who lived and died in the morning of the world.

The passing stranger knows nothing, scorns to know anything, of this land with its mantle of brown, ragged heaths, this ancient crone crouched at the foot of volcanic peaks. It is so poor, and seems so rude and rough! But whoso draws near with pious affection, sees her witching eyes glitter beneath the green transparency of mountain tarns; hears her old-world plaint in the quavering drone of the bagpipes, and from that day forth he will not forget her; he is "fascinated" by the beggar-maid.

Yes, the Limousin welcomed Denise and Jean kindly to her dales and heathy uplands. Sometimes the girl would pull up the pony in the hamlets. The little Romanesque churches had many things to show them,—here a sculptured capital, there an ancient reredos blackened by the smoke of the altar-tapers, and almost always some masterpiece of the old metal-workers in gold and silver, a reliquary in repoussé work, a shrine, a pyx in the form of a dove flashing with blue and green enamels. Other times, Denise would push open the door of a country

hovel, and Jean would take a seat beside her on the rickety settle in the *cantou* (chimney-corner). Wild-looking children, as lean as goats, would whimper at sight of the "strange gentleman." Then the goodwife would comfort them, and proudly show her youngest to Mademoiselle Cayrol. Both of them talked in patois,—and it sounded so charming in Denise's mouth!—while Jean, full of curiosity, examined the cast-iron dogs, the rudely-carved cupboard, the pewter-plates with their silky green surface and coarse chasings, half hid amongst the common delft, and above all, the pitch black shadows, the ruddy bits of chiaroscuro, the bold high lights, all those picturesque effects for the production of which the single, tiny window of a country interior is so favourable.

He had never seen such things before, except in the pictures of the Flemish masters. He would say so to Denise:

"There is a Pieter de Hooge—a Breughel."

Denise did not understand what he meant, and was surprised he should find anything beautiful in these farm kitchens with their gloom and litter. Then it struck him she did not admire these pictures because she could not see herself, the bright central figure of them all, the white and golden apparition, illuminated by the glory of the daylight. When she took up an infant from the cradle and held it awkwardly, yet so touchingly, her blonde head bending over the mite, a divine radiance seemed to shine from her face and hair. She seemed to Jean the ideal incarnation of the

Virgin Mother.

As souvenirs of these expeditions, he would buy what he considered rarities,—a bit of porcelain, a pewter plate, and offer them to the doctor in the evening, going into ecstasies about their cheapness. Cayrol, who freely owned “he knew nothing about the stuff,” duly admired what he was told to.

One day at a goodwife’s cottage in the *Habitarelle*, he discovered a pair of antique earrings in chased silver, representing vine tendrils and bunches of grapes, and a little ring, very thin and very much worn, of which two clasped hands formed the bezel.

He gave a piece of gold for these old, out-of-date ornaments, because Denise thought them pretty; and he was debating how best to offer them to her as a present, when she said to him :

“That ring is a betrothal ring. My grandmother had one of the same pattern, which she had buried with her in her coffin.”

Then she added with a pensive air :

“My mother did the same with hers. In our family, as far back as we can remember, no widow, and no widower, has ever married again. Each has kept, for all eternity, their betrothal or their wedding ring.”

Jean muttered after her :

“A betrothal ring, is it ?”

The pony was going at a smart trot; but Denise, holding the reins in one hand, was examining the gold ring where it lay on the open palm of the other.

Jean whispered :

"Try it on your finger, do!"—and before she had time to answer, he had slipped the symbolic ring on the girl's finger. But it was meant for a peasant-woman's hand and was too big for Denise; it dropped first into the folds of her dress and then on the grass by the roadside.

The pony was stopped and Denise and Jean got out to search for it; but it was nowhere to be found.

Had it rolled into the wet ditch? Was it lost in a heap of leaves?

The girl was in despair.

"Never mind, Denise. It was my fault; don't be vexed about it."

But she did not see that her companion's eyes were full of tears.

CHAPTER XI

Clearly they owed a visit to Madame de Saint-Dumine, who had lent her carriage and who took every opportunity of inquiring after Jean's health, and Denise proposed to go to the Château before Madame de Salices left. The doctor approved the plan, but insisted on the visit being a short one :

"The close atmosphere of a dark drawing-room crowded up with furniture is bad for Jean. Stay half an hour at Saint-Dumine, then make a long round in the park, and be back before sunset."

He added :

"This is important, you understand that, Denise? The last few days you have shown no common sense ; you don't come home till twilight. I don't like it,—for several reasons."

All the way there, Jean Favières was peevish ; he did not like old ladies, he was afraid they might meet other callers.

'But I tell you again these ladies see nobody, in the country. In summer two or three country gentlemen may come over in their motor-cars. At this time of year, the only people we are the least bit likely to find at the Château are Monsieur

Noaillac, the estate-factor, or perhaps the Curé of Monadouze. Very likely we shall be quite alone.'

They were so, to begin with. The two ladies were touched at sight of Jean and vied in their gracious attentions to the invalid. The latter, at first alarmed and presently amused by the old things, recovered his easy society manner, sparkled with wit and high spirits, and spoke so well on so many subjects Denise hardly knew him for the same man. Madame de Salices especially was quite fascinated.

When Mademoiselle Cayrol rose to go, the Baronne protested vehemently: "They came so seldom, and it was such a treat! Monsieur Favières really must not go before they had had tea."

It was Jean accepted the invitation.

Denise was thinking: "His ill humour is all gone. Just look, how eager he is to charm Madame de Salices, as eager as if she were a girl of twenty. He loves to be loved. He cannot bear to see people indifferent to his merits, even when he cares nothing for them. He has turned old Françounette's head; he has won Fortunade's heart, and Jeantou's. Now these two old ladies will be added to his adorers."

She recalled M. de Lapeyrie's confidences, when he had dissected Jean's character, and she told herself: "They say women are always trying to please; but I am less vain than Jean and less anxious about what others think of me. How he must have suffered when his illness drove away his false friends, and all such people!"

This eagerness to please, which Jean betrayed so naively, would have shocked Denise in anyone else, but she had grown blindly indulgent towards this boy who did not correspond in the smallest degree with her ideal of lover or husband. Say what he would, do what he might, she made no comparisons, never thought of criticizing; did not his state of health put him outside all ordinary rules?

The servants brought tea out on the terrace, and Madame de Saint-Dumine, enveloped in her shawls, almost disappeared in the depth of a sort of wicker-work sentry-box, whereas Madame de Salices exposed to the ruthless light of day her freshly powdered cheeks, the crude red of her fiery locks and her ultra-fashionable gown.

She told Jean :

“Come and sit here, by me.”

She found him diverting, and she belonged to a generation that did not fear microbes. Moreover, her accommodating optimism never let her make herself miserable long over other folks' misfortunes.

“What was it they told me about you? that you were convalescent? Convalescent! why, you are cured. Next year you will be in Paris, as blithe and brisk as anybody!”

“I quite hope so!”

But Madame de Saint-Dumine was dismayed to see the young man exposed to the draughts on the open terrace; she pointed him in vain to one of the hooded basket-chairs she affected herself, and which were to be found everywhere about the nearer gardens. Denise intervened to back up Jean in

declining the honour, assuring her hostess the fresh air could do him no harm.

The four were just beginning the meal, in full view of the glorious panorama of ravines and hills, when an automobile hooted in the distance, then buzzed like a gigantic hornet, under the chestnuts. And from this vehicle, which had drawn up at last before the Château, four individuals descended, clad in furs, leather, india-rubber and many-coloured veils, four individuals of uncertain age and sex. Top-coats and veils discarded, one saw a young man and three young women, nephew, niece and friends of the Baronne's, who were returning from the Pyrenees to Paris by motor-car, taking the longest way round. They accepted Madame de Saint-Dumine's hospitality for a few hours, and the latter introduced the party and begged Denise to offer the newcomers tea.

Then, while the young women, a brunette, a blonde and an auburn-haired beauty respectively, were recounting the episodes and adventures of their trip, the young man, brother of the fair-haired girl, and only a year or two older than Jean, helped Mademoiselle Cayrol to fill the cups and hand the plates of cake round. He was a pretty lad, his cheeks rosy beneath the tan and with a slim, active figure of his own; he was like one of Molière's Marquesses, and was possessed of fine teeth, a fine leg and a pair of little blonde moustaches—Clitandre turned chauffeur. He seemed to admire his sister's two friends very much, and particularly the auburn-haired young lady. But the brunette was not going

to be left out ; she and he kept up an unceasing fire of abuse and repartee, so that the blonde declared at last :

“ Will you have done flirting, you two ? It’s perfectly scandalous.”

Yet all four were so young, so like a troop of children out for a holiday, they could not really scandalize anybody ; their merriment only excited a smile of sympathy and, as it were, complicity. Madame de Salices abetted them, and even the Baronne entered into the spirit of the thing.

Only Denise and Jean were silent. The three little ladies had very quickly guessed what they were not told, and without showing any actual rudeness drew off little by little so as to be at a safe distance from the pale, emaciated young man with the haggard eyes.

And he—he who once upon a time would have disputed their glances and smiles with that dandified ass, “ Clitandre the chauffeur ; ” he who would once have had them all three to himself, if he could, all three coquetting and fighting for his favour—he threw himself back in the wicker-work sentry-box, shamefaced and chagrined, his only wish to pass unnoticed.

But Denise, who saw he was distressed, went up and in a low voice declared she wanted to be going. Time was on the wing, and they certainly ought not to be out much later.

“ Yes, let us go ; I am quite agreeable.”

So the pony was put to, and after a cordial “ au revoir,” they took their departure, while Madame de

Saint-Dumine was still lamenting over Jean's condition, while Madame de Salices was devoting all her energies to her new guests, and the young women were breathing more freely, relieved from a painful sight.

Denise had the exquisite tact not to try to console Jean, even indirectly, and she now showed her pleasure to be with him again in the solitude of their beloved woods. But at heart she was grieved, like a mother whose weakly child has been slighted by unfeeling companions. Reticent of speech as a rule and charitable in her judgments, she pronounced Madame de Saint-Dumine's niece and her friends very ill-brought-up young ladies, and the nephew a cad.

"I like the old ladies better,"—and Jean too preferred the old ladies.

"Yet," he declared, "they are an appalling sight. They are like each other, as two mummies, one well preserved, the other falling to pieces, may be like each other; one has kept her wrappings and painting intact, the other shows her bones through the parchment skin; but both smell of corruption. Ah! but it is a horrible thing, this growing old!"

"We must all come to it."

"Not I—thank God!"

"How can you tell?"

He made no answer, shivering with cold under the goat-skin.

"You are cold?"

"No."

She leant over to re-arrange over the young man's

knees the thick rug which was slipping down ; but as she raised her head again, she was horrified to see Jean's face ; it looked so pale and hollow and old, and the eyes would not meet hers.

"You are not well, that is certain!" she said decidedly. "Let us get back home by the shortest way."

"Why should we? I have no wish to get back. Have I said one word of complaint?"

He spoke in a peevish, hurt voice. Denise held her peace, afraid of irritating him by some ill-chosen speech. Then he murmured :

"Forgive me! I am ridiculous. I am ashamed of myself, but—if you only knew! Such little things can hurt so!"

"You are as nervous as a woman, and your imagination seizes on these trifles and exaggerates them and makes them pain you cruelly. Oh! I know you so well, all this long time we have been living together! I have studied you thoroughly. I understand you."

He answered, in a very low voice :

"You understand me, Denise?"

It was the first time he had ever called her by her christian name, but it seemed quite natural to both of them he should make bold to do so now.

"Yes, Jean. I understand this, your pride is wounded because you are so childish as to think yourself the inferior of other men. And you cannot endure without vexation the sympathy people show for you, because you seem to see pity underlying it."

She had touched the sensitive chord in the sick soul.

"I loathe pity," cried Jean, "the pity that mocks a man and sets him apart from other men, and falsifies all the feelings he inspires. He appeals for love or friendship; it is always pity answers the appeal. It assumes all aspects and all voices; it is the shadow of friendship,—the shadow of love. Ah! what tortures it has made me suffer! This very day I have seen it, mingled with fear and repulsion, in the eyes of these girls, and now, now I dare not look in your face, because I should behold it in yours."

"Nay, look; you have nothing to fear. I do pity you, my poor Jean, but not in the way you think. I pity your obstinate determination to ruin all your pleasures. Your body is sick. It will get well. I do not cry over its pains, which will grow less and disappear. But my friendship is wounded to see this sickness of your mind, a malady you only can contend against and cure."

The words soothed Jean Favières' nerves.

"You are quite sure I shall get well?"

"Absolutely sure."

"You would not tell me the truth, if it was unfavourable to me!"

"Possibly, but then I should not scold you as I am doing. I should not dare; I should be more gentle."

"Oh! do not be that. Your goodness frightens me sometimes. I tell myself: 'She puts up with me so patiently because I shall not plague her for

long.' The way you spoil me like an elder sister reminds me—do not be angry!—reminds me of the cigarette they offer a condemned man, before he mounts the scaffold."

Denise shrugged her shoulders :

"You are ridiculous, Jean. But go on all the same, if it relieves your feelings; I would rather have your wildest rhodomontades than your silence."

The slanting rays of the sun reddened the branches of the trees along the woodland road, and the pony, feeling the reins hanging loose, dropped into an easy jog-trot.

"What is that glittering yonder between the pines?" asked Jean.

"It is the lake of Saint-Dumine."

"Shall we walk as far? I want something to rouse me, something to do, something to divert my thoughts."

"Very well; but we must not be late."

"Oh! no. Come, Denise!"

He leapt to the sandy ground and took the girl's hand to help her down. The pony came quietly after them, stopping here and there to crop a mouthful of grass.

Denise was thinking :

"Have I convinced him? and for how many days, I wonder? He will not have my pity, yet it is my pity for him makes me so ingenious in finding ways of buoying up his hopes. What a difficult part I have undertaken unwittingly! I am bound to keep guard over my lightest words, to be careful of my very looks, to affect a security I do not feel, to

discuss the future, ah, me ! ”

Jean was watching her. He asked :

“ What are you thinking about ? You look very grave.”

“ Thinking I have done wrong to give in to your caprices.”

“ Only look up, and see how lovely the sunset is ! ”

In front of them was a broad opening in the chestnut woods, revealing a line of rounded, dark green hills enclosing the lake of Saint-Dumine. The fiery rays of the setting sun lighted up the twilight sky with hues of red and gold. Near in-shore, a ruddy reflection flashed on the water, and against this brilliant glow a tree bending over the bank and the shadow of the bank itself were defined with the deep blackness of sepia or velvet. Then farther out, looking more remote still by contrast with this boldly accentuated foreground, a pale vision—the whole expanse of the sky reflected in the lake with its bands of ardent red, its spaces of translucent opal, and hanging in full light between sky and mirrored reflection, like a cloud, the silhouette of a long, narrow promontory of pure gold. This was occupied by a line of detached forest-trees, dark slender pines, dainty silvery birches, that stood out delicately in the upper atmosphere, and were repeated, inverted but perfect in every detail, in the watery atmosphere below.

Denise and Jean stood side by side, not daring to speak, for water, sky, trees, point of land, all seemed a phantom landscape, a fairy fantasy with less

material substance than a soap-bubble. Surely it would vanish away at the first breath of air, at the first sound of a human voice! But no, it stayed on, only growing momentarily a little fainter, a very little fainter, in the enchanted silence of the evening.

And Denise, glancing at her companion, saw that he, too, was deeply moved, and that envy and hatred, muddy deposits of the soul, for an instant risen to the surface, were settling down again into the depths. A nobler melancholy appeared on the sensitive face with the dark circles round the eyes—the sadness of man, creature of a day, in face of Nature, that suffers change and death like him, but unlike him, is born again unceasingly out of herself.

Jean murmured softly :

“Oh! Denise, how I long to live! I have never wished it more fervently than I do to-night. I have never been less resigned. Hours like this fill me with hideous regrets. I am too young; I have not had my share! I love life too well! I *must* live! Just think! I am not twenty-five! I have done nothing, I shall leave nothing behind me, not even the trace of an action, the memory of a caress. I should die wholly, for I should be forgotten, instantly forgotten. My mother has another son; my friends have other friends; my mistress another lover. All have buried me already in their recollections. I am alone, I shall die alone. It is horrible, horrible!”

Tears poured from his eyes.

“I am a coward; and I am ashamed of myself.

I ought never to confess my fears to you. But those who say: 'I am not afraid,' are lying. Don't believe them, they are lying."

"Do not check yourself, poor boy, but weep you fill; never feel ashamed before me. I am not surprised; I am not angry. But, listen to me, Jean, your fears are only fancies. You will live; you will be happy; you will enjoy for many, many a day the beauty of the world; you will have better friends than the old ones; you will meet a woman who will love you. And then you will recall this evening, and your foolishness, and you will laugh. Jean, don't be a nervous child any more; be a man, a man who looks bravely into the future. You will live, swear you will."

"Oh! Denise, if you were saying true! If I were not unworthy of a woman's love! I would wait bravely, so patiently, for her, the woman I know—the woman who perhaps will one day love me. I never dared think of her. I hardly dare now. She must lay her hand in mine. Oh! I know it is impossible as yet. H'sh! do not say a word, only wait. I would not have her give her heart out for charity, this woman who is to come. Only I would be assured she will come. Tell me, do you think she will come?"

"Yes, Jean, she will come. But you must deserve her."

"I will deserve her."

"Conquer your fears. Be brave!"

"I will."

She drew him away with friendly, authoritative

"Come now. The carriage is there. Be very calm and very quiet. The crisis is over. It will be the last."

"It is the last."

She hurried him into the carriage, and took her seat beside him; but her hands trembled so violently she could not gather up the reins. Then, in a moment, her woman's nerves betrayed her; she shuddered and burst into tears. Jean stammered in dire distress:

"Oh! Denise, forgive me! I would kiss the ground you tread on. Oh! my consoler, my light, my life!"

The rosy light faded from the sky, the opal vanished from the surface of the lake, and the loud call of a bull-frog signalled the first star.

CHAPTER XII

ETIENNE CAYROL could not master his anxiety any longer.

Six o'clock, and no signs of the carriage. What could have happened? An accident? But the pony was sure-footed and Denise drove capitally. Jean taken ill? But the Comtesse would certainly have sent for the doctor post haste.

Not knowing what to think, he took his hat, his heavy blackthorn stick, and set off for Monadou to meet the young people.

At the upper end of the misty valley the disk of the setting sun was still plainly visible above the hills, of pure, unsullied scarlet. Presently, sinking into the lower strata of the atmosphere, it lost this excessive brilliancy that dazzled the eyes; but the slanting rays still lingered warm and genial over the village. In an instant things took on their evening aspect, a look of grave solemnity, calm peacefulness, wistful expectation.

At the crossroads of the Great Elm, the noise of a saw biting into timber betrayed the presence of Chastre, the wood-sawyer, who on fine days used to establish himself with the instruments of his trade

in front of the Chapelle des Morts. On the cemetery steps sat two or three villagers,—Fauche, the blind man, Buneil, old Brandou, leaning their backs against the rickety iron gate.

Cayrol was on the point of asking them if they had not seen the pony-carriage, when Brandou and Buneil accosted him. The doctor knew everything: did he know how true this story was that was in everybody's mouth—the purchase of the waterfalls, the building of an hotel, a campaign of advertising to be begun at once all over the country to entice tourists to Monadouze?

The news interested Cayrol intensely and he soon turned questioner: Who was the purchaser? a private individual or a company? The three principal falls, the Grand Cascade, the *Gout-tatière* or Horse's Tail, the *Redole*, belonged with the land on their brink to three different owners. Even if young Peyrout sold his portion, if old Arceix let them talk him over, still Barbazan, the Curé's nephew, the bitter foe of all modern progress, would never surrender the *Redole*.

"We shall see!" growled Buneil. "Money's a great persuader, Monsieur le Docteur. And then, you know, the *Redole*, fine as it is, is the third of the falls. It's not easily got at. It's nigh as dangerous to get a near view of as the fourth cascade, which you can only just see even in winter when the leaves are fallen and the water's at its highest. And as for the Hell's Hole, that huge, black, icy *gour*, that comes bottom of all, that awful place will never be visited by anybody but the trout—and

the drowned,—for, as you know very well, Monsi^{er} Cayrol, the strength of the current sweeps down into it everything that's pitched into the cascade whether it's offal of beasts or dead men's corpses."

"One time, there was a man from Tulle fell over the bridge," remarked old Brandou in a quiet voice "he came out a week after at the black cauldron. His head was like a cracked nut, and he was stark naked: the sharp points of the rocks had torn his clothes to ribbons. We got him out, with the *garde champêtre* and the *Maire*, and brought him up here in front of the Chapelle. His name was François Soleilhavolps. They buried him at Le Puy Saint-Clair at Tulle, and the family gave fifty francs for those who had recovered the body. I had ten francs."

"And what did you do with your ten francs?"

"I bought a hare-skin cap at the Fair at Corrèze."

The doctor was not listening; he was thinking of other things. Evidently the publicity the Sanatorium had attracted had revealed Monadouze to a group of unknown capitalists who were anxious to exploit the waterfalls. Why should they not agree to take up the old scheme again? The unfinished buildings had not lost all value, and the law-suits might be put an end to by some amicable compromise.

Meantime, Chastre had finished his job. Bunc and Brandou, who loved an early dinner, were on their homewards, and Fauche hobbled off, tapping the ground with his stick and bidding the company

whining "*Adusias*."

Cayrol looked at his watch ; half past six !

There was a chill in the evening air, and a mist was rising, cold and damp and dangerous, from the gorge where the torrent roared, when the pony-carriage at last wheeled round the great elm at the crossroads. Denise and Jean were startled to see the doctor and broke into a string of excuses. But Cayrol only vouchsafed a word :

"Be quick ! I am coming after you !"

Soon all three found themselves at home and seated before the table already spread for dinner. Cayrol let Jean explain, more or less lamely, the reasons for their delay. Denise expected a scolding, perhaps even an ebullition of temper, for the doctor was an ill man to cross. But he contented himself with saying :

"I don't send you out driving to look at sunsets. Denise knows that very well. She is responsible for the patient I leave in her care. If Jean is feverish to-morrow, and the temperature curve goes up, it's Denise I shall blame. And if the imprudence is repeated, I shall send the pony-carriage back to Madame de Saint-Dumine."

Then, with a shrug :

"You are a couple of children. I trusted you—and I was wrong. And to-day is not the first time I have seen my mistake. No, Favières, not a word, please. I shall say no more."

After dinner, when the young man returned to his room, Denise was going for her sewing when the doctor told her :

"Don't do any work to-night. It is quite warm ; let us go out on the terrace. I want to have a talk with you."

She threw a shawl over her shoulders and followed her father out of doors.

She dreaded what was to come ; but Cayrol did not seem to be angry with her. He took her by the arm and paced up and down a while with her. The silence soothed their nerves and their hearts were drawn together.

"Father, you are not vexed now?" she asked at last. "I did wrong ; I see I did, and I am sorry. Another time I will obey you scrupulously ; only say you are not angry !"

"Angry, no ; anxious, yes."

"Anxious about Jean ?"

"Yes, and about you."

"Father !"

"I have been wanting to talk to you for several days now, Nise, my girl ; but we are never alone together, never now."

"You think I am neglecting you ? Because I take seriously the task you gave me to do, because Jean Favières absorbs a great part of my time, because he is always with us——"

"Not only with us, Denise ; *between* us !"

She protested :

"Oh ! father, you are not jealous of the friendship I show that boy—for he is nothing more than a boy. You don't imagine——"

"I am not jealous, Nise, and I imagine nothing. Come, calm yourself ! You are agitated—how

agitated you are! Let us sit down on the bench, there. Of course, my little girl, I don't suppose your heart is touched, and that is why I am not jealous. But, I tell you once more, I am anxious, very anxious."

She was sitting close beside him on the old worm-eaten bench. Darkness brooded on the hills. A match threw a sudden yellow glow around, and the doctor's pipe was a point of red fire in the night.

"Denise, has it never struck you that Jean Favières might fall in love with you?"

"Oh! father!"

"Don't be too sure! He lives with you from morning to night! he admires you, he——"

"He respects me."

"Respect does not hinder love. You are free with Jean, too free, perhaps. You forget you are young too, and that he has eyes to see you with."

She made an effort to answer in a quiet voice:

"Come, father dear, you are joking. You don't suspect I could—I am. . . . Why, father, I am four years older than Jean Favières. And he is ill."

"Nay, I suspect nothing, on your side. And if I say: 'Be careful!' it is for Jean's own good. You—you are too sensible a girl, good heavens! to go falling in love with a sentimental lad, even were he sound and strong. *A fortiori*, you have nothing to fear from a sick man; I know you too well. But *he* is different; he believes himself curable, and we encourage his delusion!—Ah! I had not foreseen this. I have left you so much with him as

sick-nurse, friend, companion, playing at being elder sister to him."

Denise's cheeks were aflame. Her heart beat so fast she could hardly breathe.

Cayrol was exasperated :

"You say nothing. Speak, I say; answer my question! Is there really anything? *You* would not tell me an untruth!"

"I have noticed nothing. Jean likes my company because he dreads being alone, but if he got well if he went away, he would soon forget me."

"I am not so sure."

"*I* am."

"You don't suppose he is making up in his head a little romance?"

"A little romance? Alas! alas! Say rather great tragedy. Jean has sudden intuitions of the truth; he is afraid. If he seeks my companionship and conversation, it is because he dreads to be alone with his own thoughts. Nothing more and nothing less."

"You are right, perhaps. Ah! my Nise, I hope so. It would be a grief to us, and a calamity for Jean, if he fell in love with you. But if such thing did happen, I should not hesitate——"

"What would you do?"

"I should part from the young fellow, whom we shall not be keeping with us always. I should send him off to a sanatorium."

"And if he refused to go?"

"I should tell him: 'My dear sir, I have done what I could for you. You are responsible for

yourself.'"

"You are cruel."

"I could never encourage, were it only by silence, a fancy, a wish, the mere thought of which revolts me. Keep a consumptive in my house, a dying man, whose love would persecute you—perhaps end by touching you. No, never! And if Favières would not understand, if I felt you were not heart-whole, I should speak right out."

"You would tell him he is past hope?"

"I should."

Denise saw once more Jean's piteous face, haggard, oldened, wet with tears. She heard his cry: "I am afraid! afraid!"—and a strange feeling, an impulse of protection, hardened her against her father.

"You will not be forced to act so cruelly," she said. "Dismiss all anxiety. If Jean loves any woman, it is his old mistress. You remember? Uncle told us about her—that woman, Juliette."

"How do you come to know that? He has told you his secrets?"

"Sometimes, in his sleep, he calls her name."

It was only a half falsehood; still she *was* deceiving her father, with a woman's ready wit, though indeed it hurt her to utter the name of this Juliette who had played a part in Jean's life, and who still returned in his dreams.

"Ah!" said the doctor; "that makes a difference. It is better so."

He relit his pipe, which was drawing badly.

Denise pressed close to him, and he could feel the

silky, scented meshes of her hair sweep his cheek in the darkness.

Suddenly she spoke again :

"Father, you are sure, in your own mind, that Jean Favières will not get well?"

"Sure? Sure? Is a man ever *sure* of anything? I will only say this: 'He has one chance of living against a hundred of going under!'"

"Still, he is better!"

But the doctor protested:

"He *seems* better."

"H'sh!" whispered Denise; "we are just under his window."

"He seems to be better," resumed Cayrol in a lower tone; "but as I have often told you, these fallacious appearances are constantly found in patients who are all nerves; they are governed by their imagination, and a certain morbid over-vitality is really a symptom of their disease. Jean Favières thinks he is cured the instant the pain stops, and in this belief his condition improves."

"Everything is not self-suggestion or mere false appearance in this improvement," urged Denise, only half convinced. "Look at the weight register, look at the curve of temperature."

"You shall see them to-morrow, Denise, my girl! Then you will see the dire effects of a trifling imprudence. Oh! yes, the strict regimen of these last four months and our moral influence, which has been great and all to the good, have given back a little strength to Jean Favières. We have prolonged his life! And perhaps, if we can teach him

to discipline himself voluntarily and to stick to it, perhaps we might save him,—if he had not come too late to Monadouze, two years too late. Remember, he had tried all the quack treatments, all the serums, all the patent medicines. The organism was almost completely exhausted. I was horrified when I came to examine him. Alas! all our precautions, all the existing resources of medicine put together, cannot rebuild lungs that are three parts destroyed. Entertain no false hopes, Denise. Jean's life is a candle burning in the open air. As long as the wind does not blow, the flame flickers, but it keeps alight. Once let a puff of wind come——”

Denise made no reply. The same gloomy pictures oppressed father and daughter alike.

“But if you are not mistaken, if he is to die” (her voice broke on the word), “what can we do for him?”

“Nothing, my girl, or next to nothing: what we are doing now,—we can soothe the physical pain, keep at bay the terrors of imagination, encourage hopefulness to the very end.”

“It is not much.”

“What more can human foresight do?”

“It tells lies, your ‘human foresight.’”

“Divine foresight, Divine Providence, told lies too.”

“Then it was not worth while to change one for the other!”

The doctor protested indignantly:

“Oh! Denise, you speak so, you, an intelligent

woman, you who love the truth? The false human foresight practises is only a temporary necessity; a time will come when men will look upon death in the same light as they do the other accidents inseparable from their existence. They will strip the idea of death of all the adventitious horrors that make it odious. When the haunting terror of a life after death has disappeared, men will be more resigned to fall asleep, to be absorbed into nothingness."

"Do you think so, father? Do you really believe it can be a consolation to think: 'My death forms part of the general scheme of the universe, and accords with laws I cannot comprehend'?"

"Why, yes, it is a consolation."

"Would it satisfy Jean Favières?"

"No. Therefore we have to tell lies to Jean Favières. But in years to come men will be able to bear the truth."

"In how many hundred years?"

"Now, for some of us. Do you think *I* fear death, Denise? My life is one continual fight against death. I see it, every day, under all its forms, and I often beat it back. Yet I know quite well death will have the last word. By struggling against it, I learn to look it in the face, without vain terrors. When it is *my* turn, I shall not rebel. I shall have collaborated in the wondrous work of the universe. All my acts, all my thoughts, all my incalculable consequences will perpetuate what was best in my effort. How many lives, how many things will be modified because I have lived! You

Denise, my darling, you will carry on my existence in human kind. Particles of my being will live again with the walnut-trees of the cemetery, in the earth, in the waters, in the very air of this land I have loved so well ! ”

He stopped to strike a match. The man's face with its truculent moustaches and ruddy cheeks became visible for a flash ; then a single point of dull fire only broke the darkness. Cayrol went on speaking. On this calm evening, under this dark night of stars, he seemed actually to hear the pulse of the universal life of humanity, the tide of the ocean wherefrom each individual life emerged in its turn,—a wave that rose for an instant, soon to be lost again in the mass. He showed how humanity was made up of countless dead, and living men governed by the dead. And his daughter realised that his spirit was at peace,—more than resigned, at peace.

She recalled their talks of former days, at the stage when she had lately left the Convent. She, too, under his influence, had attained the serenity of those who seek no more with groaning and travailing. She had lost all wish to look into the unknowable, to pry beyond the familiar horizon of everyday. But to-night, in view of the inevitable death of one already too dear to her, her woman's heart rebelled, and her mind was plunged afresh in metaphysical questionings.

Memories from the past added to her trouble,—a nun who had died at the Convent of the Ursulines, and who after death kept on her waxen face a look

of ineffable sweetness. She had lain dying in agon all day, amid the tortures of cancer, and her death had been a poem of love and hope. At the great hour of twilight the angel of death had plucked her like a lily; and her sisters in God had no tears to shed, for they envied her her cruel, beautiful end.

She had been buoyed up with no falsehoods; no one had guarded her from the knowledge of death.

It is true freethinkers could die with an admirable courage, while Christians often went with shrinking cowardice to meet their God. But then how many dying unbelievers were comforted by a lingering hope, an unlooked-for revival of religious faith!

Denise thought of the Christmas sermon which had made her smile by its naive turn of phrase. The Abbé Barbazan had summed up in a single sentence the problem, that complex problem which the savants and leaders of the people were ever striving to solve:

"Man does not resign himself easily to bearing evil and injustice, to seeing him and his dying to death, without knowing the reason of it all. What will take the place of the Saviour, my brethren?"

Cayrol asked suddenly:

"You are not cold?"

"No, I am quite comfortable."

She had reopened her eyes, and could see, above her, a faint thread of light in the front of the house, piercing between the half-closed shutter. In Jean's room, behind the white curtain, a night light was burning quietly, without giving off either great light or heat, like a discreet, faithful, never

varying love.

What a night of stars it was! All these mighty cosmic creatures, clad in glistening robes and girt with girdles of fire, that shone like watch-fires or mirrors in the sky and wheeled for ever, rhythmically, in a stately dance, how near they looked, seen thus from our little earth, crowded together in space like flowers in the same garden-plot, like children of one and the same people! . . . Were they not all sisters, moved by the same sentiment, and what men called their attraction, was it not the impulse and accord of unimaginable sympathies? . . . Of old the men who hunted the bear and the aurochs in the primæval forest, on the flanks of only half extinct volcanoes, and later still, the shepherd-sorcerers of the Monédières had believed that a mysterious bond existed betwixt the orbs of heaven and human souls. Before the first priest, the first astrologer was born, each planet ruled the particular destiny of a man. . . . At long last God had appeared in the heavens; then the firmament sparkled with love, as the phosphorescent sea sparkles; it told forth the glory of the Creator; the white hosts of ransomed souls soared into the infinite ether where the humblest human prayer could blend with the music of the spheres. Man, the thinking, feeling being, was no more alone in the universe of Nature.

But the times are come when man measures the fraction of infinity open to his gaze. He numbers and names the stars, and calculates, with the certainty of geometry, the unheard-of distances that

separate them from us. They are no longer sisters but slaves subservient to law, condemned to destruction, innumerable and yet solitary. In heavens, where God fades away like a phantom, reign emptiness and death, and the cry of suffering humanity falls without response or echo into abyss of silence.

Denise feels the callousness of Nature, just when her father was feeling the stirring pulse of life. The chill as of death freezes her to the heart, and her eyes, leaving the sky, return to the little glimmer between the shutters, lowly symbol of human life and tenderness.

CHAPTER XIII

THE midday meal brought Denise and Jean together again under Dr. Cayrol's scrutinizing eyes. Jean showed pallid cheeks and very bright eyes, feverish gestures and a forced gaiety broken by long silences; but such was his usual look and manner. He addressed himself, in his conversation, more often to the father than the daughter; but he had all along shown the most considerate deference to the doctor. Cayrol persuaded himself that Jean's passion, if it existed at all, was only a fancy, a momentary predilection, and not a serious affair of the heart, deliberately conceived and fed on hopes, longings, purposes.

"Monsieur," announced Fortunade when she brought in the coffee, "there are people waiting in the hall to see you."

It was market-day at Monadouze, and all the morning patients had been coming to see the doctor, one after the other.

"I'll go directly," growled Cayrol. "What a trade! Never a moment's peace! The other night I had to set a broken arm, dress one poor woman's burns and attend another in childbirth,—and this in three different villages, all between midnight and

five o'clock in the morning. By rights I should have a partner."

Jean Favières' face lit up with a smile as he said:

"I long to study medicine. You might take me not as a rival, you know, but as assistant. What do you say?"

"You are not cut out for suchlike jobs, my friend Favières."

"No, not now. I should look odd enough prescribing for other people in my present state of health! But later on, when I am quite cured—"

"You have no vocation for the work."

"How do you know that, doctor? 'The wind bloweth where it listeth,' and your example——"

"Nonsense! your imagination carries you away. You only look at the picturesque, the romantic side of my life and calling; the other side, the side of revolting realities, would very soon disgust you. No, I cannot picture you a country doctor, with heavy boots and rough clothes, tramping the roads, of winter nights, to visit a pack of greedy peasants in filthy beds."

Cayrol got up at the end of this tirade, which he had pronounced in a big, bullying voice. Jean said nothing, and made no immediate answer. At last he said:

"You do not take me seriously, doctor. I don't think me good for much,—that's the truth."

"How you exaggerate!"

"Not I! My godfather made me out to you a sort of spoilt child—a dead failure. I know what

I fail; but if I got well and had a few years allowed me to make up in, they should see different! The spoilt child would soon grow into a man. I did not mean to offend you when I said your example had set me thinking what I might make of my life. I admire you—you don't mind my saying so,—and I think you a lucky man. So I conceived the idea of copying you one of these days."

"Why ever should you think you have offended me?" said Cayrol, who was sorry for his roughness. "I am very much touched, of course. Only I doubt, when it comes to the proof—Yes, yes, Fortunade. I'm coming."

He threw open the door.

"Good-day to you, good people! Nothing serious? Well, we'll see to it."

A chorus of drawling, nasal voices greeted his appearance.

"Good-day, Monsieur le Docteur."

Five or six peasants were seated on the bench in the hall, their baskets between their knees and their sticks in their hands. One of them, who wore a hare-skin cap on top of a filthy-looking bandage got up first and followed the doctor into his surgery. The others, finding more elbow-room, settled themselves farther apart, and an old man installed himself at one end of the bench. He had a hard face, as coarsely coloured as a wooden saint's over a village altar, and the lichen of his beard, growing thickly below his shaven chin, climbed up his cheeks to meet the gold ear-rings in his ears.

Fortunade, who was carrying the dinner-plates to

the kitchen, hailed him as she passed :

“ You’re not over particular, eh, Père Gargalhou ? The wood will grow again, I suppose you think ? ”

The old man pretended not to hear. He held his knife half open in his hand which hung down over the bench-end, and underneath he was furtively whittling at the wood.

The door was shut again.

“ It is a curious thing,” said Denise, “ Gargalho never comes to consult my father without cutting off a piece of the bench, or a bit of the curtain fringe or a tassel from an armchair. He thinks our furniture is ‘ charmed,’ and has its share of the doctor’s ‘ power.’ ”

Jean, seated by the window, did not answer. He was looking out into the garden, where old Franchonnette was getting the pails ready for washing day.

Denise saw the doctor’s words had pained him, wounded his feelings to the quick.

“ Father is jealous ! ” she thought with a sudden pang. She was blaming him, daring to blame him however timidly,—her father who had always commanded her admiration, her unshaken confidence. She told herself he was too quick to take umbrage, unjust, hard and cruel. Slowly she crept up to Jean Favières till she just touched the back of his chair. Then she said softly :

“ Come, come, don’t be vexed, father didn’t mean to hurt your feelings. He is still irritated,—and I am surprised to see it. But he is so much attached to you really.”

Out in the hall, a shuffling of sabots, the opening and shutting of a door and Cayrol's voice calling :

"Now for you, Lionassou !"

Jean, with one arm extended, was holding up a corner of the curtain, showing the garden lying white in the sunshine, its rose-trees with their russet boughs, its lilacs breaking into a thousand little green buds, its squares of winter cabbages, its arbour of twisted vine-stocks, all black and apparently dead. Fortunade and Françounette, their petticoats kilted above their coarse blue stockings, were carrying pails of water at arm's length. A pigeon lighted close to the house. It had little pink feet like rose-buds, and its back glittered iridescent like the wet slates when a sun-burst follows hard on a shower of rain.

Jean let the curtain fall again. The dining-room was full of white light, and the clock ticking against the wall seemed the peaceful heart of the warm, silent place. The muslin blind, after quivering a moment, fell back quietly against the panes, shutting off the two young people from the outside world. Jean, turning round, and throwing back his head, raised his two hands, which met his companion's where they rested on the back of the chair, while his eyes, looking up under their lashes, encountered Denise's, who was still speaking, but suddenly fell silent.

They gazed in each other's faces, he with eyes of adoration, she with a beseeching air. *Her* eyes were like the evening sky, grey and limpid, sad and tender, looking down into *his*. Every drop of blood

had fled the girl's cheeks. The mouth was shut close, the lips very serious, as if guarding a secret. The brow was crowned with a faint halo, when the light struck her hair.

She looked at Jean, as if waiting to bend forward to receive a chaste caress. She could see the transparent temples with their network of blue veins, the noble, high forehead between the scant eyebrows and the thin, straggling roots of the unnaturally silky hair, the fine arch of the nose with its nostrils as if carved out of wax, the great wide circles of the eyelids and the eyes themselves, those dark eyes, filled with an almost animal languor, in which she seemed to divine a question, a reproach lurking. She could see, too, the havoc disease had wrought in the young face,—the hollow cheeks, the prominent cheekbones, the withered complexion, the dry lips, where no woman's kiss would ever more fall. Prey foredoomed to death, clay which must soon lose the warm human outline, dust, dust! And this was Jean, it was still Jean, so soon to be but the lifeless image of a man, then a handful of ash beneath the sod. It was Jean, alive with thought, desire, love. And lo! in Jean's eyes an ecstatic joy awoke, bursting forth like the sun from behind the clouds, piercing the obstructing vapour, blazing with a power and brilliance that grew momentarily more intense, and shed on Denise's face an irradiating glow of ardent warmth and sweetness ineffable that dazzled her eyes and struck to her very heart core.

Not a word; not a movement! Only outside

sound of voices, footsteps, the loud flutter of the pigeon rising on the wing and beating the air before soaring heavenwards. And, without speech, Denise and Jean have said all :

Jean's eyes confess : "It is you I love, you know that, you know it,"—and Denise's make answer : "I know it."

That was all. Denise drew back her hands. Jean closed his lids, overwrought with happiness. And then she slipped away, trembling as if she had committed a crime.

CHAPTER XIV

DENISE was unhappy; she could see no issue out of the equivocal position in which every day involved her more deeply. C her father's thoughts, and worse still, his possible suspicions, she could learn nothing further; but she felt he was full of vague anxiety and keeping discreet watch over her conduct. Then Jean was altered, more emotional, more confidential, more cheerful, too, though he had never pressed for an avowal, any favour, any definite promise.

They went out together less often since Cayrol's scolding, and never beyond the last houses in the village. The season allowing long stays in the garden, Denise would take her seat beside Jean but always with Fortunade sitting only a few yards away. At first Jean had been annoyed at the forced companionship; but on reflection, he had recalled the doctor's ardent suspiciousness and half-veiled hostility, and dreading to make an enemy of a man he cared for so much personally and whose influence over Denise was unbounded, he had resigned himself to a prudent reserve.

Even this was not without its charm. Jean had never before known the delicious sensation of wait-

ing to enjoy ; only too often, by plucking the flower of his desire too hastily, he had dashed its petals to the earth. He had always been the curious, eager, impatient lover whom women treat with the indulgence due to a half madman. His piquant, beardless face, his audacity, the look of a saucy page he had managed to keep till after twenty, had earned him many victories ; nay, sometimes, believing himself the aggressor all the while, he had really fallen a prey to artfully-devised provocations. Juliette, who had won and kept him longer than any other woman, had almost thrown herself at his head.

But true love had not come to him in this lightning fashion. Denise had not captivated Jean at first sight. He was too ill, when he came to Monadouze, to think about love, and she was too different from the women he had known to immediately attract his thoughts in that direction. By what secret alchemy had respect, affection ripened into passion ? At what precise moment had Jean Favières seen the sister merge in the beloved ? He could not tell. Day by day, little by little, Denise had modified him, fitted him for a new life ; she had given and he had taken, without either being conscious of the exchange, yet in his heart Jean believed he had "loved her all along."

Lent ended with the month of April, and amid sunshine and showers, Spring put off her russet and assumed her verdant mantle. Already, in the damp underwoods, the sweet violet was over, and others, harbingers of May, were springing by the roadsides flaunting their large, pale flowers that looked almost

blue, as if to deceive the village girls looking for the scented sort.

As it did not rain on Palm Sunday, the farmers prophesied favourable winds for the hay harvest; in the Limousin, as everybody knows, Palm Sunday "rules the winds." It is common knowledge, too, that you must not wash clothes nor put down eggs to hatch during "Black Week," because, before the year was out, there would surely be a death in the house. Similarly it is a great imprudence to bake, though you may churn butter without fear of harm; it will keep fresh a long time, and will cure scabs on the face.

It is likewise the season when the *Aguilaneufs*—choir-boys and catechism children,—go round begging for nuts, apples and eggs dyed red with beet-root. On Holy Monday they begin their rounds, and the stingiest goodwife durst not drive them off with her broom-stick when their fresh, shrill voices strike up the "Song of the Passion:"

*"La passion de Jésus-Christ
Qu'est tan doulento . . ."*

In the villages, now few and far between, where the mediæval tradition lingers on, the "*Réveilleur*" or "*Awakener*," still performs his office on the last nights of Lent or on All Saints Eve. An old man in poor circumstances, chosen by the Curé, sometimes, it may be, the beadle or grave-digger of the place, he goes about ringing little bells, and his Gothic stave, half patois, half French, flutters like a night-bird over the beds of sleeping Christians.

* Jesus Christ's passion, how grievous it is . . .

Sad and solemn in the gloom of midnight he prowls round the houses like a ghost, to warn pious folks to hold themselves ready for their end :

“Reveille-toi, peuple chrétien !

Reveille-toi : o'est pour ton bien.

Quitte ton lit,

Prends tes habits,

Pense à la mort qui doit venir . . .” *

At Meymac, the “*Réveilleur*” has another song, to beg an alms for himself :

“Les pauvres réveilleurs

Ont tant de peine !

Courent toute la nuit,

A la rosée . . .

Donnez-leur quelque chose

Par la fenêtre ;

S'il n'y a pas de fenêtre,

Par la porte.

Nous prendrions tout de même.

S'il y avait beaucoup . . .” †

For some years the custom of the “*réveillé*” had been abandoned at Monadouze; the Abbé Barbazan had forbidden it ever since a pregnant woman, hearing the “*Réveilleur's*” chant, had awoke in a panic, and a miscarriage had followed. Hence Fauche the blind man, who in his younger days, along with old Veydrenne, had gone these nightly rounds at Lent and All Saints, always declared religion was

* “Awake, Christian people ! Awake ; 'tis for your good. Leave your bed, don your clothes, think of death that is bound to come . . .”

† “The poor ‘Awakeners’ have so sore a time ! They trudge all night, out in the dew . . . Give them something out of window ; if there is no window, then by the door. We would take it all the same. If it was much . . .”

going to the dogs at Monadouze.

"You should have heard them in those days, Fauche and Veydrenne!" Françoquette would declare; "the fine pair of croaking night-birds they made! The next morning they would come round to beg eggs and apples, which nobody ever refused them,—old Veydrenne would have put a *biset* (a spell) on the poor devil, never fear! It's true, all the same, folks nowadays have no spirit; a '*réveillé*,' well sung, is a fine thing in its way. 'Tis a church song like another, and puts us in mind to pray for departed souls."

Fortunade, as a child, had heard Fauche and Veydrenne, and she owned to the terror they had inspired in her.

"Fauche swears he will begin again some day—that the Curé has no right to stop him. It's not the praying part he thinks about, you know, Françoquette, it's the red eggs and the nuts."

They were chatting in the kitchen one evening, the day before Good Friday. Fortunade had come to help spread the wet linen and fold the dry, for they had taken the precaution of getting the great Spring wash in hand before Palm Sunday.

Denise came in to wish them good-evening. She was very tired, and was on her way up to her own room, earlier than usual.

"My father is in his study with Monsieur Jean. Take him in a liqueur glass of old cognac and his pipe. Light the fire in Monsieur Favières' room. You will be coming back to-morrow?"

"To-morrow, Friday?"

"To finish folding the linen. The fine weather is breaking; it is too mild."

Fortunade was far from anxious to work on Good Friday, but Denise added :

"If you don't like to, I will see to it by myself," to which the girl answered :

"Then I'll stay till Vespers, Mademoiselle."

Françounette was grumbling to herself: "It brings *biset*, it does, to work Good Friday; why, the very horses and cattle stay in the stable that day."

"These doctors," she growled, as she washed up the plates, "they think themselves wiser than the Popes of Rome!"

Fortunade found Cayrol and Jean seated in the doctor's study, the lamp between them. Cayrol was saying :

"She does not look well to-night. She overtires herself, because she will see after everything, manage everything."

After a moment's thought, he went on :

"She is so confoundedly obstinate, is my daughter. Sweet-tempered,—but a will, a tenacity of purpose!"

"Come now," said Favières with a smile, "you have no call to complain. She simply worships you."

Cayrol resumed :

"She would be better for a change, something to divert her thoughts. When you are on your legs, my young friend, you shall go to a health resort in the mountains, with Lapeyrie, and I'll send Denise to her aunt's at Clermont. She has not left

Monadouze for five years, poor girl!"

"What!" cried Jean in sudden alarm, "you are not sending me away?"

The corners of his mouth quivered, his dark eyes dilated, and Fortunade, as she leant over the table at his elbow to put down the glass and the cognac, could hear his breath come pantingly, as if in a spasm of pain.

"I send you away! send you away! Why, what a way of putting it!" protested Cayrol. "I give you furlough for two or three months, and after that, if you are not perfectly sound and well, you will come back to your room here. That is an understood thing."

"You promise?"

"Of course I promise."

Jean broke into a laugh:

"Ah! doctor," he exclaimed, "you frightened me."

"I did not mean to. If I let you go, that is because you are very much better; it is a good sign. But not right away, that's self-evident,—towards the end of May or middle of June. We will talk it over with Lapeyrie. He ought to be coming after Easter."

Then good-naturedly, but yet in a masterful tone, he concluded:

"Trust to me, Jean. It is best so."

Then, turning the conversation abruptly, he observed how much Fortunade was improved lately. Was it that, with the twentieth year, the woman was developing in the child, so backward hitherto?

The brown skin, the sombre eyes seemed lit up from within by the fire of youth, no doubt, and a new-born joy of life. Jean, who had always thought the girl ugly and unattractive, agreed in spite of himself that beauty had descended on her, as wit does on the silliest women with the first dawning of love. Fortunade's wish to turn nun, or at any rate to remain unmarried, her fierce piety, were giving way at last, as she grew older. Yes, the bigot was becoming humanized; her deep voice had taken on soft, purring inflexions, and when she stood thinking, her hands hanging idle by her sides, her great eyes had a sweet, soft look in them and seemed to gaze far, far away, as if waiting for someone to come to her.

That night, before falling asleep, Jean thought over the doctor's words. He was at once startled and reassured, alarmed at the possibility of a parting, reassured by this definite token of convalescence. If he had doubted his speedy cure, Cayrol's decision would have removed all uncertainty.

"Even supposing he were annoyed at the partiality Denise shows me, suppose he were jealous, the doctor has too high a sense of professional honour, too much nobility of character, to deceive me. Besides, he undertakes to receive me in his house again. I have his promise."

He must be sensible, he thought to himself, and sacrifice everything to regaining his health, which, once re-established, would let him begin his life over again, for Denise, with Denise.

"I don't mean this redoubtable father of hers to

have any excuse for refusal. If I *must* go for my health to the mountains, I will go. If I must go to Algiers, America, Japan, I will go. My utter and absolute docility will spike Cayrol's guns. If need be, I will serve him seven years, like Jacob. But I shall find ways of softening him. I will revive the Sanatorium scheme, and get people to take up the shares. If I am cured at Monadouze, other will be the same."

He asked himself if he should take Denise to Paris, if he should resume his profession of an *avocat*. But no, Paris did not tempt him.

He dreamed of buying a large estate near Monadouze, and living on his lands as a country gentleman.

"When the doctor is tired of practising, he will come and live with us. We will have a little château. No, a pretty old house, not too pretentious, with a high grey roof, a dovecote, a chestnut-spinny, a fish-pond. We will live a good deal to ourselves, and be very happy. I shall collect a vast library——"

Little by little his thoughts grew incoherent. The night-light was burning; the fire blazing. Françounette banged to the door of her room on the floor above, beside the corn-loft. Finally Jean dropped asleep.

He slept for some hours, and dreamed he was marrying Denise at the church of Monadouze. Barbazan was officiating. The Virgin on the altar in spite of her mantilla and puffed skirts, was very like Fortunade Brandou. They were saying:

"The Virgin has cured Martial Veydrenne's broken leg."

And the doctor seemed to think the miracle quite in the natural order of events. Denise was crying happily under her bridal veil. The nuptial bells were ringing.

Then Jean awoke, to hear a little bell tinkling in the distance out on the road. The night-light was just expiring. A silvery gleam, penetrating the window-curtains, bathed the walls and the tumbled white bed in grey, misty light, and lo! the little room held within its pale, ghostly precincts all the magic of the moonlight.

Outside the cocks were crowing, deceived by the moonlight into thinking dawn was come. Jean was falling asleep again when the bell sounded once more, nearer this time. Then heavy, dragging footsteps stopped before the house.

"Someone come for the doctor to see a patient," thought Jean, who had learned to take these sudden calls as a matter of course; already he fancied he could hear the man shouting his: "Hé! Moussieu le Docteur, hé!"

Then the creaking of Cayrol's shutters, the sharp question: "What d'you want?" and the brief dialogue that followed, then the shuffling of the doctor's boots as he crept downstairs with infinite precautions—that were not of the smallest avail.

No, it was not a call for the doctor. Nevertheless somebody was there, who would not go away, somebody watching the house. A madman? a belated traveller? a robber? In this strange land,

where Veydrennes still raged unpunished, haunted the heaths by night, and even strangers by dint of hearing these wild stories which they laughed at by daylight, found themselves, when twilight approached, as full of superstitious terrors as any countryman. Certainly Jean Favières felt unaccountably, ridiculously uneasy, and wished heartily the doctor would awake.

Ashamed of his childish panic and anxious to look and see what was really wrong, he slipped out of bed, dressed, put on his slippers, and well wrapped up in a rug, stepped to the window and lifted a corner of the curtain.

Outside the country stretched white in the moonlight, carrying on to the far-away horizon the whiteness of the curtained room, as if all the world over, in men's houses no less than on the vast expanses of the earth, a twilight compounded of moonlight and mist had replaced the darkness of night. A rolling flood of vapour filled the valleys above which, like vast grey arches, the mountain crests seemed to hang suspended between the unseen earth and the moonlit heavens. The sky was almost as white and colourless as the earth, and the pallid moon, veiled with a light halo of diverging rays, rode aloft like a phantom host in a spectral monstrosity.

On this night of Good Friday, when the bells are hushed in all Cathedrals in Catholic lands, when the Faithful commemorate with fasting and silent prayer the agony of Christ in the Garden, whose soul in torment had gone by, resolved already into

the mist, to the note of a small, feeble passing-bell?

No, there is nothing. Jean listens, and asks himself if he has not been dreaming with his eyes open. Yet surely he heard a bell, and footsteps, or was it all a hallucination of the hearing? Only the dull roar of the Falls, deadened by the fog, goes on and on monotonously, till the ear ceases to take note of the sound, and it grows indistinguishable from the general silence. But as Jean draws back a step from the window, lo! the fantastic ringing begins again, at long-spaced intervals, quite close at hand, and the young man's nerves quiver with a supernatural awe. An icy wave runs over his flesh; his hair rises on his head, pricking like thousands of tiny needles. Meanwhile, on the far side of the terrace, a form rises slowly, grey in the pale moonlight. Jean recognizes the twisted body, the spidery arms, the idiotic grin, of Fauche the blind man. The hideous face lifted to his own fascinates him; the mendicant's hand silences his bell, and his ear, sensitive to the faintest sounds, catches perhaps the rustle of the curtain, perhaps Jean's labouring breath.

He guesses there is someone there, in the house, and strikes up:

“ Réveillez-vous, les gens,
Les gens qui dormez tant !
O la grande folie,
De dormir sans souci ! ” *

* “ Awake, good folks, folks who sleep so sound ! Oh ! the mighty folly, to sleep so without care or heed ! ”

The voice quavers, but this only accentuates the quality of the "*Réveillé*," with its broken metre and minor cadences, stumbling finally as if by mistake on the final syllable of the quatrain. Jean knows what it all means now, and curiosity takes the place of alarm. What a sight, and what a piece of luck to be there to see it ! The night like the livid nights of the Purgatorio, the veiled moon, the blind man with his frantic gestures, the ancient rhyme, a relic of far-off centuries, solemn and halting, with its recurring echo of the *Dies irae*. Like a *dance of death* painted on a charnel-house wall, an old fresco, blackened by the smoke of tapers, discoloured by damp, defaced by age, but still decipherable with its procession of skeletons, field-workers, soldiers and kings, so the old Gothic air survives with its quaint lines, half patois, half French, its assonances in place of rhymes, fragment of a mutilated poem :

"Voici la mort qui roule,
 Qui roule autour de vous. . .
 Elle fait comme l'*umbra*,
 Elle vous suit partout.
 La mort n'est pas *flatieira* :
 Elle n'épargne rien.
 Emmène hommes et femmes,
 Enfants, petits et grands.
 Et les rois et les reines . . . *

A window opens on the upper floor, and Françoisette shouts angrily at the blind-man, who stops

* "Here is death who comes prowling, prowling around you . . . Death is like your shadow, it follows you everywhere. Death is no flatterer ; it spares nothing. It carries off men and women, and children, small and great, yea ! and kings and queens . . . "

his singing. He retorts in a whining voice with an incomprehensible piece of abuse, while Françoquette scolds him in patois, peering out of the attic window, like an owl.

Then another window opens, and another. Cayrol's angry demand and Denise's anxious question are heard simultaneously :

"What's wrong now?"

"Oh! what is it?"

"Did you hear?"

Françoquette cries out :

"Go in, shut your window again, Mademoiselle! It's nothing but Fauche, that good-for-nothing gad-about, Fauche; he's singing us the '*réveillé*.'"

"Oh!" murmured Denise, "if only Jean has not understood!"

Then the doctor sends the blind man packing with a string of big, sounding oaths :

"Clear out, you——"

Fauche sets out again with his slow, dragging gait for other houses where good Christians live, people who won't drive him away with curses, but make the sign of the cross when they hear his bell, and repeat a *Paternoster* for the dead.

"Et les rois et les reines,
Dans tous leurs beaux rubans,
N'auront pas plus de grâce
Qu'un pauvre paysan. . . ."

The voice dies away in the vast, white silence. Cayrol's voice changes, as he asks his daughter :

"You were frightened?"

* "And kings and queens, in all their fine ribbons, will find no more grace than a poor countryman. . . ."

To which she whispers back :

"I was frightened for Monsieur Favières; he is so impressionable the sudden awakening, the dismal air and the ill-omened words may have agitated him, even dangerously."

"Denise, you don't hear him stirring in his room?"

Jean can guess how Denise leaves the window and listens at the dividing wall, anxious and eager. Then she goes back to the window: "No, not a sound!" she announces.

"Get to bed again, quick! Why, how he fills your thoughts, *your* Jean Favières does! 'Pon my word! one might suppose he was the only thing that counted for you, in the world. It's going too far! Don't be so excessively anxious, please!"

The two windows shut to at the same moment.

In the diffused light that filters through the curtain, Jean makes his way back to the bed, with the stealthy tread of a savage trying to throw an enemy off the scent.

He lies thinking :

"She has gone back to bed now, but she is not asleep. She is thinking of me, I know. I feel it. And a thin stone wall is all that separates us! She is picturing a Jean Favières horrified by the '*Réveilleur's*' summons, trembling and sick at heart, his nostrils full of the smell of corruption. How many times has she seen me fly to her for refuge, like a frightened child, and beg for a word of hope to hearten him to live!"

Rising in bed, with outstretched arms, Jean turns

towards the wall. He pictures the girl lying there, in the panelled alcove, on the little pillared bed, she, too, rising on her couch, her naked elbow pressed into the pillow, her hair rolling down in long waves. She is listening, but she only hears her own heart that beats in the darkness, her heart so heavy with love and pity it hurts her, and which she presses, as if to help it bear its burden, with her trembling hand. But what does she fear? *He* has no more need of consolation, intoxicated as he is with the wondrous certainty that he is loved! Death has gone by; love has replied. The dear voice has driven far away the world of graveyard phantasies and nocturnal terrors. Let men and women who know not love, let them bewail their God to-night! For the rest, it is hallowed to love, this night, like all other nights of their youth and prime. Fearful imaginings of callow youth and maid, lonely regrets of abandoned lovers, calm bliss of married mates, scathing and sobbing delight of couples that must part in the morning, love eternal burns under the mournful sky and in the close-shut chambers, this night as on all other nights. And if the "Awakener" goes by, they who love will not hear him, or they will say: "Love is stronger than death."

Jean has forgotten he was ever ill, and by how grim a road fate has led him to this house. He is a young man, a lover, like other lovers. He is fain to have her wholly his own, his well-beloved, the hem of whose robe he durst not kiss; he is fain to clasp her in his arms, and that, in her turn, following nature's behest, she be the weak, fear-

ful one to fly for refuge to him. He presses close against the wall, lays his open hands, his bosom, his lips to it, with a frantic craving to grow one with it, that the inanimate stone may be imbued with life, grow into warm living and flesh. He calls "Denise, Denise!" he seems to feel her drawing nigh, to see her bosom heaving too, her beautiful arms outstretched to him. Through every fibre of his body he drinks in the soft, delicious contact.

Without, the day dawns, showing a grey, tear-wet face, crowned with pale shafts of light like thorns. The mists are shot with rainbow hues, and above them the hills lift their tall blue shoulders, range behind range to the horizon. The world is not sad only grave and solemn, waiting for the mystery of the coming day.

CHAPTER XV

SOON after nine Françounette brought in the *premier déjeuner*. She wore an air of circumspection, as she addressed Jean :

“Mademoiselle wishes to know if Monsieur Favères has slept well,—because there was a drunken fellow made a disturbance in front of the house last night.”

Jean asseverated he had not heard a sound.

Joy has such a power to stimulate and refresh that the young man rose from his broken slumbers as if issuing from a magic fountain of life. His countenance bore no traces of fatigue, and when he appeared downstairs Mademoiselle Cayrol was reassured at the very first glance.

“It seems you have had a drunken man serenading you?” he remarked to the doctor laughingly. “I had no notion of it. I sleep heavily. Is that a good sign, doctor?”

“Yes, a very good sign,” Cayrol answered.

Fortunade served the coffee on the terrace, where, on fine days, Jean’s lounging-chair used to be brought out. The sky, which had been sunny earlier in the morning, was growing overcast with heavy clouds that looked like grey wadding. The mild south-

west wind announced that a storm was brewing somewhere in the distance, away behind the pine-woods of Chadan.

Some linen, sheets and towels of a glaring white, almost blue in shadow, hung out to dry on wires stretched across part of the garden, and the blossom of the pear-trees, in full bloom, seemed to take almost a greenish tinge against this dazzling background.

"Let us fold the sheets," ordered Mademoiselle Cayrol; "it is blowing up for rain."

She took a sheet by one end, threw the other to Fortunade, and with hands held high, and bodies swaying from the hips, they drew away from each other, stepping backwards, then advanced again, only to retire once more. The wet linen straightened out slowly; Denise trod on the hem of her dress, stumbled and laughed merrily; then, with a sweeping gesture she laid the sheet, folded once lengthwise, on the grass, and folded it again crosswise, once, twice, three times, and tossed it into a basket, crying: "Now, Fortunade, another!"

This half-rhythmical march, these vigorous, graceful movements of the arms, poetical as the world-old gestures of the sower, the gleaner, the laundress beating clothes, stirred Jean's sense of beauty. He watched Denise's back, the perfect poise of the figure on the hips, the flash of golden hair on the neck behind, the pink lobe of the tiny ear. And he thought of his folly of the night, of the kiss imprinted on the wall. Naively, he was telling himself:

"We have loved each other fondly, without seeing one another or coming near one another. She as well as I. Is it possible she is not dreaming of it, in her inmost mind? I can dream of nothing else."

That kiss, that phantom of a kiss! Never had the memory of complete and full enjoyment entranced Jean Favières as did the recollection of that futile caress!

"And to think that I durst not touch her shoulder, or her beautiful hair! To think that only yesterday she was still a forbidden thing to me, a woman, like other women, defended by an invisible veil against the audacity of a man's longings. To think there was a time when I could not see she was even pretty! She is a woman, a beautiful woman, a woman desirable of men! She shall be mine."

No, he would not, he could not think the word "mine." His eyes dazzled, his heart throbbed in his bosom; an impulse to laugh and cry seized him, to embrace anything and anybody, trees, stones, even Fortunade, and even the doctor himself. He would fain have pressed the whole world to his breast. It was grotesque, it was mad, but it was delicious!

Jean turned his head; beside him in an iron garden-chair sat Cayrol, reading the *Petit Corrèzien*.

"Ha! the enemy in sight!" he laughed to himself,—and he recalled the strange mixture of anxiety, suspicion and annoyance in what he had overheard of the injunctions the doctor had given to Denise, only last night.

Suddenly Françonnette appeared on the scene,

round the corner of the house, calling :

"Monsieur, there's a lad come from Saint-Dumine !"

"One of the tenant-farmers ill ?"

"No, it's Madame Le Baronne ; she was taken suddenly."

Cayrol got up reluctantly :

"Is it really serious ?"

"The lad says Madame is in great pain. She is frightened, and thinks she is going to die. She asks for an injection of morphia."

Then the old woman added with an air of mystery and disapproval :

"They let the cattle afield this morning. That brings harm to house and masters, that does !"

"Well, if the cattle *were* let out, Françonnette, they did not omit to have them exorcised by the Curé, the same as last year."

"Father ! are you going ?" called Denise.

"I am bound to go ! Will you come with me ?"

"No, I have a hundred things to do. Fortunade is going at three o'clock."

"As you please !" said Cayrol in a tone of disappointment.

He went off to the house. Half past two was striking on the dining-room clock.

Gravely, and without a word, Denise went on folding the linen, while Jean pretended to be absorbed in contemplation of the landscape.

The sun was still shining—a few straggling rays, but the clouds, momentarily gathering heavier and denser, were invading the remaining space of blue

sky. The vast, swelling, granite slopes were a fine purplish grey, varied by the silver of the lichens and the brilliant green of the fresh mosses.

When the basket was full, Denise and Fortunade carried it into the house, and Jean was left alone. But before long Denise returned, and, standing a few steps away from him, spoke of ordinary everyday topics in an indifferent tone. He answered "yes" or "no," and suddenly she fell silent.

A fit of embarrassment fell upon both, the embarrassment they always felt more or less in each other's presence. Remorse for a falsehood, an uneasy sense of complicity, both these contributed, as also, on his side, a fear of offending, and on hers, a dread of the momentous words he might perhaps be going to say.

Jean was the first to break the spell, and with a fleeting, beseeching smile he pointed to the garden-chair. Denise looked round, scrutinizing the road and the house with its drawn curtains and closed doors, though hardly conscious of the wish for solitude this inspection betrayed. Finally she sat down. Tired with handling the heavy pieces of linen, she was breathing hard and her cheeks were scarlet, while all the greys and greens of the landscape were reflected in her eyes. Jean put out his hand to her, but she withdrew hers with a blush. Disconcerted: "What, you won't?" he asked. "We are no longer friends then?"

She thought he spoke strangely, that his look, the ring of his voice and the sense of his words did not agree. He was saying one thing, and thinking

of another. She, too, was thinking of another thing which she could not put into words.

Nevertheless, she abandoned her hand—and lo! the instant they touched, Denise's and Jean's hands, they clung together like living creatures endowed with independent will, one masterful and persuasive, the other submissive and fearful. Jean murmured:

"Denise! This is the first time for how many days?"

"The first time?"

"That we have been at all free. If you had gone away with the doctor I should never have forgiven you."

"You are jealous?"

"It is not *I* am jealous, you know that very well, but I might learn to be."

"Oh! no, Jean! You would be very wrong to blame my father for so natural a feeling, so worthy a feeling. His anxiety——"

"Say rather: 'his distrust.'"

"Well, if you will. His distrust is justified by our friendship, our good understanding. I have never had any secrets with him before!"

The young man was vexed:

"You talk like a little girl! Filial affection does not impose the same duties on a child and on a woman. You are grown-up, mistress of your own secrets, of your own feelings, mistress of your own person, after all!"

"H'sh! h'sh! don't get angry," she said, rather shocked. "In law, no doubt, you are right, I *am* mistress of myself,—a young lady of twenty-seven"

(she tried to laugh). "But, in practice, I am deeply attached to my father. Our living alone together so long, the necessity of being everything to each other, the force of circumstances in a word, has drawn tighter the natural bonds between us, and created fresh ones, more uncommon, perhaps stronger ones. There is a great deal of friendship, camaraderie, in our filial love."

"How your voice softens when you speak of your father!" he interrupted, stung by jealousy and altogether forgetting the tenderer feelings of the night before. "In truth, you do not know *which* way your heart leans. It is unnatural, and disheartening. Ah! Denise, Denise, you will never love anyone else as you do the doctor. He has no cause to be jealous! What am I beside him? a stranger, an interloper!"

"You are an ungrateful boy. For your sake I am telling my father lies, this father I love so dearly. Yes, I am deceiving him by my silence. And yet he loves no one in all the world but me, and I loved only him, before you came."

"And since?"

He had heeded only Denise's concluding words, and he questioned her in a trembling voice:

"And since my coming, do you really—tell me, do you really think you love me?"

"Oh! can you doubt it?"

She was agitated, troubled, with a serious, almost sad expression on her face, like a mother's when a child she loves teases for some impossible boon. Her eyes had lost that lovesick, submissive, shy,

entrancing look they had worn for a brief while on the Saint-Dumine evening.

And once again a painful, a horrid intuition told Jean that Denise was indeed giving him the best part of herself, the purest flower of her soul, but not the passion of flesh and blood, the plain, unsophisticated love his nature craved for.

She whispered :

“What have you to reproach me with? Are you not sure of my heart?”

“I thought I was.”

“But you are not now?”

“I cannot tell.”

He shut his eyes, and memories crowded on him. Last night—the tender voice, the too tender voice that said : “Jean ! poor Jean !” and the painful anxiety that had kept the speaker awake. Could he have deceived himself? No, by a mysterious telepathy he had learned the truth with an absolute certainty no evidence of the senses could have given him.

Answering his own thoughts, he said :

“I was sure of you ; I had every reason to be. There was an hour in your life when you really loved me. And it was not on the banks of the lake, nor yet by the window, when you looked deep into my eyes. No, you were alone with yourself. You had forgotten your father altogether. And I——”

Denise turned pale, offended without knowing why, offended in her most secret, most sensitive modesty, and drew away her hands which Jean was still holding in his.

He exclaimed :

"How you have altered ! How prudish and scrupulous and grudging you have turned, yes, grudging of yourself ! How you endeavour to prolong the state of doubt, of uncertainty, that I loathe ! Denise !"

He drew himself up to his full height :

"Denise, I can bear this no longer ! You must speak out. What is in your heart ! You cannot have been guilty of the crime, yes, crime, I say, of playing with me, persuading me to think I might get well, and live, and love you, and be loved by you ! You are no coquette ! You have a conscience ! At your age, brought up by Dr. Cayrol, you are, more than other girls, responsible for your acts."

She had not the heart to plead :

"But you never asked me to give you, and I never promised, more than tender affection, and already I have lavished on you more than I ever promised."

In what a tone of authority he spoke ! No more ingratiating boyishness in his manner ! His very features seemed changed,—to wear a more manly, more mature look. He was another being, no longer seeking forgetfulness of his precarious state in love-sick delusions, but resolved to build up the future on a firm foundation of assured realities.

"I explain myself very ill, dear Denise. I am clumsy, and abrupt, because I am deeply agitated. If I am deceiving myself,—wait ! do not answer yet ! —if I am deceiving myself, I shall only hold myself to blame ; I have lived too much shut up within my-

self these days, and I have fancied things. Yes, that is very possible. But I want to know. Denise, I was *not* asleep last night, when the '*Réveilleur*' came by. I heard his chant and his bell, and everything you and your father said. I heard your fond cry to me, or I thought I heard it, Denise !”

She had sprung up as if to fly. And now, paler than Jean himself, she held her head aloof, hiding her face from him. But she made no protest, and her silence was a confession.

“ Why did you weep at thought of me, Denise ? ” the young man insisted, exerting a great effort not to break down himself ; “ was it pity ? or was it love ? I thought it was love, love more than pity, dearest Denise. And, far from despairing, I blessed that old madman of a Fauche ; he thought he was reminding me of my death, but he was really bringing me happiness, happiness ! Denise, did you not feel my hands, my mouth, pressed to the wall that parted us ? I cried passionately to you of my love, while you wept ! And I thought happiness was mine. Did I deceive myself, Denise ? No, not yet, do not speak yet. Think well before you answer. Perhaps you have lied to me out of kind-heartedness ? Perhaps you have not come to me with full freedom of action ? It is my fault ; I say I am to blame. I have been so cowardly, I have longed so to live, that I dragged words of hope from your lips ! It was very excusable, then, if you were not altogether sincere. But now that I have got back my strength, this pretence of love that I implored you to give, I will have none of it. I am

proud, strong enough to bear the truth. Denise, I will not accept a heart given out of charity. Denise, I will not have your pity. Denise, I will have you no more as the friend, the sister, you were to me. I want you, you, body and soul, without restrictions or limitations, as a man wants a woman, a wife ! ”

The vehemence of his words had exhausted Jean. He lay back against the cushions of the couch, and his features ceased to work, assumed only an expression of fatalistic resignation.

He gazed at the woman who, with a word, would sentence him to death or life, and from her he was ready to accept either alternative unconditionally. Verily, if he lost her, Favières would die willingly,—and the sooner the better. He dissociated himself once for all from life, if Denise formed no part of it.

Yes, how he gazed at her, and everything about her, that he might never forget this moment, and the picture she presented ! She was the centre of the universe, and sky, hill, silvery pear-trees, seemed to exist only for her. Her golden hair seemed to gather it itself all the light of the dim landscape. She was Fate.

Denise's hands fell helplessly, half-open, on her knees. And lo ! all was changed, the universe and Jean's soul, when he saw her eyes. They shone with a great light that spoke plainer than words,—and what they expressed was consent !

Then he began to tremble, as he stammered :

“ You will—you will ? ”

She answered, “ I will.”

Then he sighed deeply, as if life were coming back to him. But, after saying so much, he knew not what more to add; and it was Denise who gave him her hand and pressed his in sign of pledge.

He raised himself a little, drawing Denise towards him, and she slid with a supple movement into a half-kneeling posture on the grass, her bosom inclined towards Jean. He asked her:

"Is it true? is it really true?"

His fingers touched her hair, her rosy cheek, her shoulder. If he had dared a kiss, Denise would not have averted her head, but he had long ago lost hardihood for this. He asked again:

"You are sure?" and she replied:

"I am sure."

"Beloved!"

Then quickly, she asked:

"You are happy, Jean? Say you will be happy!"

"I cannot tell if I am happy. It is so much more—so much more exquisite than happiness!"

Out in the road, at the very spot where the "*Réveilleur*" had halted, there was a trampling of feet, gusts of laughter, calls and cries which Denise and Jean paid no heed to. Then suddenly, like a lark trilling heavenward, a boy's voice was raised. "Hallelujah!" it sang, and the note of triumph rose fresh and clear in the moist, balmy air of spring.

CHAPTER XVI

CAYROL looked out between the half closed shutters, through which the green reflection of the leaves and the homely scent of the lilac blossom penetrated into the darkened room :

"They are off," he said. "Denise is driving. They will soon get to Saint-Dumine. As soon as the heat of the day is over we will join them there."

M. Albert Lapeyrie, lying full length on the old sofa, growled savagely :

"What a nuisance, this lunch !"

"Oh ! I could not refuse. The Baronne has obliged me over and over again, lending me her carriage to move patients. She is so fond of Denise, and she is interested in Jean. It is such a pleasure to her to see us all together again before you leave us."

"Very well ; I will make the best of it."

Cayrol took his usual seat at the old writing-desk of black oak, and spoke in quite a different key as he said :

"And now, Lapeyrie, let us have a talk."

"A talk!—and not a minute too soon either ! All day in the train I have been thinking : 'Now

what's wrong there, I wonder. Why these depressing letters, why this sudden decision to pack Jean off to the mountains?' *His* letters are just the opposite, full of good heart and hope, and what's more, happiness! I was prepared for anything,—except for the extraordinary, the miraculous improvement I have found. Monadouze has cured Jean, and you want Jean to leave Monadouze!"

"You said 'improvement,'" replied the doctor; "yes, that is the right word. Jean is not cured, and I have never said he was."

"But he may be."

"I have my doubts. Let us say, by way of compromise, he will perhaps prove our first fears wrong, and hold out for several months, or even years."

"That is something gained, anyway—and does you infinite credit! You have every reason to be proud, Cayrol!"

"But, be this as it may, cured or no, bettered or no, Jean Favières cannot stay on here."

"Why not? Has he displeased you? has he offended you? Why, you always seemed to think so highly of him!"

"Why, yes, I do think highly of him; indeed, I am very fond of him, and it grieves me deeply, I assure you, to send away the poor boy amongst strangers. But you have not noticed anything, suspected anything, Lapeyrie? No? Nothing, really? Well, *I* have, and I know what it means. Jean Favières is in love with my daughter."

M. Lapeyrie raised his eyebrows:

"With Denise? Nonsense!"

Then, after a moment's reflection :

"'Pon my word! it's possible! Perhaps you are right! He entertains an enthusiastic veneration for her that has sometimes made me smile when I read his letters. Jean in love with Denise? After all, it is not astonishing; indeed, it's very natural. Denise is a charming girl, and my godson, seeing no other woman, has made her the sole and only lady of his thoughts. The boy,—he is still but a boy, has always been in love with some woman, present or absent, real or imaginary. And what says our Denise of this fine passion? I wager she is a trifle amused at it, a bit flattered, a bit touched!"

The question, put in a half-laughing tone of indulgent playfulness, seemed to annoy Cayrol, who answered drily :

"Denise, you may take my word for it, Denise is neither amused nor flattered."

"Nor touched?"

"I hope not, indeed! She thinks as I do on all points, and——"

"And like you, she takes this calf-love, this boyish passion, seriously, tragically? She is alarmed for her honour? She has besought you to save her from the irresistible seducer? No, no, Cayrol, Denise has too much simple-mindedness and too much good sense to take offence at a boyish passion, ardent and romantic, no doubt, but quite innocent, I can take my oath to that, for I know young Favières. Even, in other days, when he was full of vigour and vitality, he would have respected your roof. Now you have nursed him, brought him

back to life, he knows too well what he owes you."

"Don't get angry! I never said Jean wanted to seduce my daughter. Denise Cayrol is not that sort!"

The doctor had risen, and now took up his stand facing M. Lapeyrie:

"Don't make me say such things! We are a brace of fools! I know quite well Favières respects Denise. If he had not, I should have pitched him out of doors, ill or well. Good God! I am a father as well as a doctor. But the situation is more exceptional, and more serious too, than you suppose. I want your co-operation."

"I will do whatever you tell me. It was I brought Jean to your house; if his presence there were going to cause trouble, I should be responsible. Come, be reasonable, and sit down, man! We both think the same."

The doctor related how his suspicions had been awakened, how he had questioned his daughter, how he had done what he could to keep an eye on the doings and conversations of the two young people.

"I noticed nothing blameworthy, but plenty of things to make me anxious—looks, ways of saying the simplest things, tones of voice, I don't know what all! And first and foremost, Jean's constantly trying to be alone with Denise, without me."

"But she?"

"She has no suspicion of it."

"Oh!"

"I assure you it is so. I have asked her. She told me: 'You are deceiving yourself, father,' and she said it quite simply and sincerely. I have not

dared to question her again, because I feared to disturb her peace of mind by showing her a lover prowling round her."

He sighed disconsolately :

"Oh ! Lapeyrie, I could not trust myself, I was afraid of giving in to a petty feeling of paternal jealousy. I told myself twenty times over that my duties as a doctor, my duties towards the patient I had received under my roof to cure him, outweighed a mere selfish anxiety, and a ridiculous one very possibly. But I had to believe the evidence of my senses. Jean loves Denise. If he has not confessed his love to-day, he will declare it to-morrow."

"And if he did, what then? seeing Denise does not care for him."

"She does not care for him now, I am sure of that. But love is infectious. Denise may let herself be touched by this 'perpetual adoration' that dogs her footsteps and envelopes her. She is entirely pure-minded, and quite resigned to her destiny; *but* she is a woman."

"Not one of the loving sort !"

"She is a woman," repeated Cayrol. "She was created for marriage and motherhood. This love hovering about her will re-awaken in her heart cravings after unknown satisfactions, lawful enough, most certainly, but which our life here does not content. And if these longings, these vague regrets, can find no other object but Jean, if he is there, always on the spot, if she nurses him, pities him, pities him to excess !—Ah ! you understand how

dangerous it all is, Lapeyrie!"

The tears stood in Cayrol's eyes. He went on:

"It is not,—believe me it is not jealousy that pains me now; it is remorse of conscience. I have taken it too much as a matter of course that Denise would not marry; I have not, as I should have done, procured her opportunities of meeting young men. True, we were poor, and marrying men scout the girl who has no portion. Men are very cowardly. But all the same, I was almost glad of their cowardice, because it left me my Denise, my beloved Denise!"

"I don't think you have the smallest fault to reproach yourself with, Cayrol. There are so many fathers who are eager to marry their daughters and intrigue to catch a son-in-law,—and without succeeding! Denise would never have accepted the first comer. How many girls in France are condemned to the same lot!"

"And they feel it; they suffer——"

"Yes, for a few years; then habit makes it easy for them."

"It only needs an accident to resuscitate their youth. They never say a word, they are quiet and gentle-mannered, and contented, in outward seeming, and all the while their hearts are full of despair. And when to the bitterness of old-maidhood is added the longing for a child, what is the torment of these unhappy souls then?"

Albert Lapeyrie reflected for a moment or two.

"And if,—it is a mere supposition,—if Denise did love Jean Favières, you would not give your consent."

"Oh! Lapeyrie!" cried Cayrol indignantly.

"Then what do you decide upon?"

"You take Jean away, you install him at Sauverre-des-Pyrénées. And, when autumn comes——"

"You receive him back in your house?"

"Perhaps—I let him think so. But between you and me, I make no promises."

"So be it!"

"He agreed to this arrangement himself,—not without pain, certainly, but still fairly willingly. He dares not disobey me; he wants to have me on his side. Poor lad!"

"And Denise?"

"Denise will go to our cousin's at Clermont. I want to give her a change of surroundings, to distract her thoughts, to show her fresh faces. She looks very young, does she not? and she is charming and sweet and pretty! I think she is good-looking myself."

"Yes," assented Lapeyrie, touched and thoughtful, "yes, she is good-looking, and more than that, she is a good, brave, clever girl. I appreciated her at her true value last winter when I brought Jean to you. But I never supposed, any more than you did, that this lad with one foot in the grave could possibly go and fall in love with her. Denise! why, she seemed to me to be one of those exceptional beings who are outside love altogether, above it. Alas! we sacrifice these noble creatures because they smile at sacrifice and accept it as their pre-ordained destiny. They proclaim themselves happy in living for others, for others only. And the world

believes them; the world has every motive to believe them."

Cayrol had his face buried in his hands.

"You touch the wound of my heart," he said in agonized tones. "How have I come to sacrifice the only being I love, and misunderstand the essential needs of her soul? Circumstances favoured my blindness. I could see no efficient means of forcing fate. Set up in a big town? Too late! My livelihood was at Monadouze, inseparable from Monadouze. Elsewhere I risked failure, perhaps penury. Cultivate friendships in the neighbourhood? I have tried. But the middle-class bachelor of the French provinces hardly ever marries for love; he 'establishes' himself to secure certain family or professional advantages. I have felt, you know I must have, for years that Mademoiselle Cayrol did not count among marriageable girls."

"It is no fault of yours."

"No, it is not! Yet why am I filled with remorse? I feel I have not adequately and completely fulfilled my duty as a father. If I had a son, after giving him a good bringing-up, education, the means of earning his own livelihood, I should then tell him: 'Go and live your own life, my boy! Make your own home and find yourself a mate, at your free will and pleasure. Your happiness depends on yourself and nobody else. We are quits!' But in France, in French society as it is constituted, a father cannot say to his daughter of twenty: 'Look out for yourself; find a husband!' It is for him to discover possible fiancés, amongst whom the girl will choose.

No, if he fail to assure his child the protection and love of a husband, he cannot claim to have fulfilled his whole duty towards her."

"There are plenty of poor girls who get married unaided."

"In the great towns, perhaps, not at Monadouze. Denise sees scarcely anybody but peasants. No family at Tulle has come into any close intimacy with us. The only man who has ever loved her is Jean Favières."

M. Lapeyrie was rolling a cigarette. A touch of irony mingled with his emotion. He pointed to the bust of Comte which stood in front of the dull chimney-glass:

"Nevertheless, Cayrol, the man whose spiritual son you are, has foreseen the case of beings unfitted for paternity; for degenerates, for weaklings, who have hearts and find solitude irksome, he proposed chaste marriages."

The doctor replied:

"Comte's thought was a beautiful and a generous one, but humanity is not yet near enough perfection for unions of this sort to answer. I have no confidence——"

"Lord! no, you would not give Denise to Jean Favières, even as—a *sister-wife*!—and you would be quite right."

Cayrol got up.

"Come, let us say no more about it! I have had enough. My mind is made up, so where's the good of discussing the thing? There are some supposed cases too revolting to contemplate."

CHAPTER XVII

MADAME DE SAINT-DUMINE, half-hidden in a huge wicker-work garden chair to keep off the sun, held Albert Lapeyrie's hand long in her own little cold ones. She had known him as quite a child, and he had been many a time at the Château to play with his sister, Denise's mother, when Madame de Saint-Dumine was still a young woman.

The rustic tea-table was placed on the broad sloping lawn under the lee of a clump of oaks and chestnuts. Denise and Jean, sitting at no great distance from each other in canvas garden chairs, were talking to Noaillac, the estate-factor, and three or four visitors who had driven over from Tulle by motor-car. But Jean was more talkative than Denise, rattling on with a sort of feverish excitability, while his companion kept falling into fits of moody abstraction.

Her grey gown, the prettiest she possessed, which a Parisian lady's-maid would have turned up her nose at, was behind the fashion of the year. It was cut, like all Denise's dresses, rather full and long in the skirt, with a close-fitting bodice, almost like a riding-habit, that showed off her magnificent bust

and fine arms to great advantage. A neckband of very finely plaited tulle sat low on the white neck, while on her hair, the colour of autumn gold, Denise wore a toque of grey straw, with a soft muslin veil of a darker shade wound round the crown, and trimmed with the ashen-blue plumage of some sea-bird.

The young *avocat* from Tulle and the officer, who were capping motor-car stories, looked flatteringly at this handsome girl, who hardly deigned to return their glances. M. Lapeyrie, the first greetings over, took a seat beside her.

"She is sad at heart really," he thought. "Of the loving sort or no, she is sorry to lose the comrade, an exacting one no doubt, but still charming and perhaps tender, of her lonely days. Cayrol is wise to send her away. Dear little Denise!"

He asked :

"What are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking the hay promises well and the mowers will be early in the meadows this year. In three weeks there won't be a single daisy in the fields. How time flies! We are getting old, Uncle Albert."

He tried to laugh it off:

"I don't imagine those gentlemen think you very old."

"Their opinion is nothing to me, I assure you."

"Ask Jean's!"

"Your godson sees the best side of me, because he has a grateful heart."

"And he is right. Do you believe, Denise, he is

leaving willingly? ”

“He wants to get well. Besides, he will be coming back.”

Jean suddenly turned his head :

“I shall come back in the autumn. But I am not going away willingly, Mademoiselle ; I am going by the doctor’s orders. Where could I be happier than at Monadouze ? Ah ! godfather, you will see me looking melancholy sometimes ; that can’t be helped. I had sworn never to set foot again in a sanatorium.”

“For a few weeks, that’s nothing so very dreadful, my boy ! In September you will be going to your mother’s, and the end of October——”

“I shall go and see my house at Arles again, the house my grandmother left me. Oh ! such a dear house ! If only you could see it, Mademoiselle Denise, you would fall in love with it right away. But one day perhaps you will see it, if ever you come south with the doctor. Don’t say no ! Who can tell what the future has in store ? ”

“Before I go south, it will be your turn, Jean, to come back to Monadouze.”

“Yes, I shall be here to see the leaves turn yellow in the Saint-Dumine woods. How glorious this park must look in its autumn foliage ! ”

The Baronne replied :

“Yes, you will admire it, Monsieur Favières ! At this very moment I am having a clump of trees felled which confines the view and hides a fine mountain background. The woodmen are at work now ; can you hear their axes ? ”

"Our fellows are never in a hurry," put in the factor. "I am going to see if they are ready to attack the oak. About the little beech, are you still of the same mind, Madame la Baronne? Is it to be sacrificed?"

"I should like to see it once again, before giving final sentence," said the Baronne. "Gentlemen, will you walk there with us? Monsieur Lapeyrie, do you remember the great fellings of timber by the lake side, about '72, or '73, I suppose? Your mother, Denise, was not married then."

They proceeded, Denise giving her arm to the old lady, to the extremity of the long avenue that bordered the lawn. The sound of the axes grew more distinct, and they could hear the voices of the woodmen, though these were still invisible.

The factor shouted :

"This way, this way!" and then sharply : "Look out!"

There was a swaying in the green wall of foliage, then a deadened shock. It was a beech falling across the trunks of its brethren already laid low.

"We can come near now, eh, Beneytou?" asked M. Noaillac.

There were four of them, who had been busy there all the morning,—old Beneytou, the two Touzac brothers, and Martial Veydrenne.

They stepped back to make way for the gentry from the Château, and each of the newcomers proffered his or her advice. Madame de Saint-Dumine, seated on a mossy hillock, declared :

"I ask a reprieve for the oak."

Cayrol and the army officer argued that the oak having been injured by lightning, did not deserve to be spared, as it obstructed a noble view of ravine and hills. Then the Baronne begged them to stand well back, in the middle of the lawn, to see if the felling of the tree would open out a harmonious vista.

M. Lapeyrie had stayed beside her, together with the factor. Denise and Jean had picked out a corner for themselves, within the wood and near the woodmen, who touched their caps one after the other to the doctor's daughter.

Dressed in drab breeches and thin flannel shirts they displayed their bare arms as brown as beech bark, on which the knotted veins stood out like rootlets swollen with sap. Veydrenne's shirt was wide open in front and showed a broad chest white than the sunburnt neck, the firm, elastic chest of a thin, wiry athlete. Jean gazed at the man with curiosity not unmixed with admiration and perhaps a touch of envy.

He could not help muttering to himself :

"A fine brute, anyhow, that Veydrenne. Why he has muscles like a gladiator."

But he caught a look of disgust on Denise's face.

"You think him handsome? Why? He looks like an animal."

Jean entered no protest. He was glad Denise did not admire this male savage, with the low brow and powerful chest-muscles, solidly planted on his strong, rather bowed, legs.

The factor, who had overheard, said under his breath :

"The fellow is as strong as a Turk, but he's a low blackguard. The other men only put up with him because they are afraid of him. I have been on the point of dismissing the fellow ten times over. He is capable of anything, is Veydrenne."

"Even of working!" put in Denise, with a smile.

"It is his fancy, for the moment; but it won't last long. He will do like the wolf, who always goes back to the woods in the long run. If Madame la Baronne had listened to me, we should never have taken on the good-for-nothing!"

He started back; Veydrenne's *cognassou* (felling-axe) had fallen within an inch of his foot.

"Mind what you're after, good God! Cursed fool, don't you know how to keep a hold of your axe yet?"

"Each to his trade, Monsieur Noaillac; we don't cut down trees with the tongue, however sharp it is!" sneered Veydrenne insolently.

Then he stepped up to a young beech, almost the twin of the tree already felled, and with his *cognassou* attacked the silky grey trunk, on which a pale line soon showed, where the inner flesh of the young tree was exposed. Then old Beneytou put the two-handed saw in the wound, and the two men set steadily to work. The metal penetrated without effort, and apparently without effect, for the fine, slender tree stood without a quiver. But suddenly the warning cry rang out: "

"*Arrié!*" (stand back).

And almost soundlessly,—a slight, very slight rending only and the beech fell, with a touching grace,

like a young god wounded. It fell without a bough breaking, without losing a single one of its fresh green leaves, still glossy with the gum of the young buds. The stem was cut off clean, without crack or split, and showed the young growing wood of a creamy white like the head of a mushroom.

The factor gave the order :

“The oak now !”

The father of the forest, the Titan that the lightning had scarred but not laid low, stood alone, away from his prostrate fellows, in the middle of a small clearing. The roots, writhen like serpents, showed beneath the moss, ramifying in unexpected directions and pushing their way underground as far as the boughs stretched outwards in the upper air. The trunk, incrustated with lichen on its northward face as with a cloak of silvery fur, concentrated in itself the vitality of the tree which it drew up from the soil with the sap and inhaled from the atmosphere through the thousand breathing pores of its leaves. Above, below, was the same exuberant life, in the air free and gladsome, under the earth dim and laborious,—everywhere puissant and wonderful.

Veydrenne walked slowly round the tree, like a wily foe looking for the best place to strike. He measured with his eye the space the vast spread of foliage would cover. At last he made up his mind, and, with legs planted wide apart and the sweat beading his brow, he lifted the axe and struck, obviously exulting in the destruction of this mighty growth of centuries. The spectators of the unequal duel between man and tree shuddered involuntarily.

Then Beneytou swung *his* axe, and the two woodmen fell steadily to work with alternate strokes that rang in rhythmical cadence the funeral knell of the great oak. Not a branch quivered; the tree still lived its life unconscious of danger, unconscious of everything save a vague hope, it may be, of bud and acorn in due season. It knew nothing of man's machinations. But lo! the saw bit into its substance; the tiny teeth ate in with a low hiss as of mocking laughter, while from the narrow, deep wound a fine red dust flowed. Suddenly shrill cries and the startled whirr of wings were heard among the leaves.

"The birds are quitting," exclaimed Denise.

It was the time of year when every tree is full of nests and twittering nestlings. Linnets, blackcaps, chaffinches, blackbirds,—a whole population fondly trustful in the oak's steadfastness, was beginning to foresee a disaster they could make nothing of. High up in the branches mothers were fluttering frantically over their eggs or their brood of helpless little ones. Then suddenly the oak seemed to come to life and realize its peril. It trembled in every limb and creaked and cracked ominously and indignantly, like a living thing that is loath to die. There was an uneasy swaying and stirring in the mass of its foliage; then it fell, slowly, crushing the younger trees, its children, in its descent. The crash of its overthrow was heard at Monadouze, borne thither by the mountain echoes.

Veydrenne kicked the prostrate giant with his foot:

"Ha ! ha ! at last. You're down at last !"

Meanwhile M. Noaillac was scrutinizing the trunk and reckoning up the yield in planks and firewood. The innermost heart of oak, now exposed to view, showed graceful waving lines and hues of brown and yellow, with the growing wood surrounding it like tender flesh under the wrinkled skin of the bark. Denise laid her open hand on this fibrous flesh, which felt cool and alive, all moist with the exudation of the sap.

A breach was open in the stronghold of the forest, through which a vista of mountain and valley appeared, blue and green, under a cloudy sky streaked with long white trails of mist. Distant voices could be heard shouting:

"Now work to the right, up to the birches !"

The woodmen fell to work again, while Madame de Saint-Dumine and M. Lapeyrie stood in conversation with the estate-factor.

Jean Favières moved a little aside, and in answer to a beseeching look Denise followed, stooping every moment to complete a nosegay. His eyes never left her, urging her insistently: "Further away ! further away still !"

A hundred yards from where the men were at work, the ground formed a cup-like hollow, full of the scent of flowers,—a fragrance so intense, so penetrating that the two gasped and their temples throbbed, a fragrance that seemed almost to suffocate at first, then lulled the senses in a gentle somnolence. The whole ground, beneath the grey-green shade of the trees, was one deep, pure, vivid blue,

carpeted with thousands and thousands of hyacinths growing thick and close from the rich leaf-mould.

There Denise and Jean halted, and he, moved by an irresistible impulse to touch, to caress, to win pity, threw his arm round the girl's shoulders. But she pushed him gently away with a: "Take care, Jean!"

He whispered:

"I am leaving you to-morrow."

"Courage! we must be brave."

"I am brave, you see I am; else how could I carry it off before those people as I do? Do you imagine they are anything to me, that I would not ten thousand times rather be alone with you?"

"Alone! how could we be alone? My father and uncle would never have left us to ourselves. Ah! my poor Jean, the doom is pronounced; let us try to be strong and not give way too much."

"That is easy for you; you are common sense incarnate!" he cried bitterly.

"Don't be so unjust and cruel! I feel it keenly."

"You really do?"

"Yes, more than you think. I shall be so lonely."

"You will have your father."

"He cannot take your place."

"You will write?"

"Oh! yes, often."

"I shall write every day. I could not bear this separation, if there were not this link between us."

She leant her back against the trunk of a birch.

Her veil slipped down, without her making a movement to fix it back again on her toque, and her eyes that looked almost green under the reflected light from the leaves, lost their look of tearful brilliance behind the grey gauze.

She was thinking of the days she had lived through since Easter,—barely twenty-five in all; yet they had contained more poignant emotions than all the twenty-seven years of her previous life; they had been days of concentrated anguish, of torturing moral disquiet, of falsehood and remorse for falsehood, days she longed for the end of, and which of a sudden had grown so strangely beautiful and had sped by so fast. She had not dreamed of the paralysing sweetness that clogs the will and reason, and seems to creep into the very blood of women, when a man's gaze envelopes them perpetually, like the atmosphere they move in, like the garments that cover them. Denise could not believe how dread and delicious a thing it was to be loved, almost as much so as to be in love oneself—so absorbing and so moving she could think of nothing else, could not even clearly recall the past. She felt like a stranger in her own life, as if living in a strange house; she had lost touch with her customary ways of thinking and feeling,—and this again was painful to her. She felt herself an ingrate, a traitor. But at heart she knew this would not last, that she was passing through a crisis, and that, once Jean was gone, she would regain the empire over herself.

Nevertheless, this departure of his, which was at

once a relief to her feelings and a palliation to her conscience, Denise entirely forgot when she came to sharing the poor boy's illusion and tasting with him an unforeseen, but always tearful, happiness.

Jean Favières too thought fondly of these five and twenty days since their betrothal, which he had spent in studying and listening to his future wife, "to learn her by heart," as he said. He too had been happy in *his* simple way, without self-examination, without internal conflict.

His soul had flowed towards Denise by natural impulse, as a brook runs downhill; and his present sorrow was equally simple and unaffected.

He repeated again and again that he would write every evening, and that Denise must write to him. She must tell him her thoughts, her most trivial actions, the colour of her gown, the state of the weather at Monadouze and the sayings and doings of all the people round her.

She gave the promise he desired; then she asked:

"Will you speak quite sincerely in the reports you give me of your health? I am troubled about this. You won't want to make me anxious, and you won't tell me when you feel tired—or when you have been imprudent."

"Why not?"

"If you were ill, worse,—to take an unlikely case,—you would let me know?"

"Yes, indeed I would. I have become too much accustomed to your looking after me; you have spoilt me so. Yes, I should write: 'Far away as

you are, think of me, Denise, pity me, pet me'—and you would cure me by telepathy!"

"Why, of course."

"But if I was very ill, if I sent for you what would you do?"

"Don't talk of being very ill!"

"But if I was?"

"They would bring you here."

"But if I was too ill to be moved?"

"What an idea!"

"Tell me, answer me,—what would you do?"

"I should come to you."

"Really and truly?"

"I swear I would."

She had spoken almost too solemnly, and he saw her face pale under her veil. He was on the point of saying: "Then you think that might happen?" but he checked himself, and trying to smile:

"No, don't swear," he said; "just give me your promise; I don't like these sounding formularies that bind people down. A promise,—that is more than enough. My question was tactless. You shall be free; your own heart will tell you what to do."

She shrugged her shoulders:

"Ah! but that is just like you, Jean. You won't let me be bound by any obligation towards you. What childish pride! How *can* you prevent my owing obligations to you, when I am your fiancée?"

"There is a large spice of humility in my pride. I am such a poor creature, Denise! I have taken so much from you, and given so little. Thank heaven,

there is the future! I shall repay my debt yet."

"You owe no debt."

He plucked a twig from a tree and began to lash out at the tall bare stalks in places where the hyacinths had shed their blossom.

"Yes, I do. And I will clear it off by making you happy, darling. How? I cannot tell; but I will do it. Yes, that is why I have the courage to tear myself away from you. I must get well. Your father must be left no pretext to forbid our marrying. But it is hard, very hard!"

"For my sake, Jean!"

"For your sake, yes, I will be brave."

The sun was beginning to set, and the great boughs of the tallest beeches were bathed in golden light where they spread above the undergrowth. Denise raised her veil, and, worn out with conflicting passions, laid her cheek against Jean's shoulder.

"My poor darling, let us bid farewell here, among the trees and flowers. Who knows if we shall be alone again, before we part to-morrow? I want to keep this memory."

"This, and all the others. We have so many, so many, many beautiful memories,—that Christmas night, that snowy day when you peeled my lemons, those hours when you used to read to me——"

"Our walks and drives."

"Have you still got the silver grapes?"

"Yes."

"But the ring with the clasped hands, you lost that!"

They lived the past over again, while the strokes

of the woodmen's axes marked the pauses in their eager talk, and the fragrance of the trodden hyacinths enveloped them in an almost intolerable sweetness.

Jean pressed Denise to his heart:

"Say you love me. I want to hear it again, from your own lips, again."

"I love you, Jean!"

"As a friend?"

"No."

"As a pitying sister?"

"No."

"As a true and loving wife?"

"As a true and loving wife."

She spoke truth for the moment, for she had no thought of the conventional meaning of the words she uttered. Are there two ways of loving? Her mind was too confused to tell.

Voices were heard calling, "Denise! Mademoiselle Denise!"

"They are looking for you," said Jean. "Go back to them, quick! say what you think best to your friends—say I have wandered off through the woods, round by the lake—they will find me at the Château later on. I cannot see them again like this."

"Jean!"

"Farewell!"

"Jean!"

She could not find it in her heart to tear herself away, to leave him alone with his passion and pain. But he snatched off her veil, only loosely fastened with a single pin, and pressed the crumpled, torn,

piece of grey gauze over the girl's lips, and pushing her away :

"You must," he cried, "you must. Go !"

She walked rapidly away, her eyes blinded with tears, towards the clearing where she could hear the voices still calling her name. Her gown showed grey between the birches, as she flitted by like a wild dove. When he lost sight of her, Jean plunged into the brushwood, pushing his way through its intricacies at random. In all directions ran intersecting paths, revealing narrow vistas filled with a green twilight and carpeted with countless hosts of hyacinths. Between the straight stems of the chestnuts the lake glittered like liquid pearl, set in the gold of the flowering broom. Jean dropped wearily on the ground cushioned with moss and fallen leaves. He pressed his face in the veil, which still retained the warmth of a woman's hair, the scent of her body, the fragrance of her breath, and the touch of it tortured the young man's senses ; he cried aloud after Denise's receding form, already a long way off.

The scent of the hyacinths oppressed him like an atmosphere heavy with the fumes of love-potions and voluptuous exhalations. Every time a tree fell, away yonder in the depths of the woods, Jean felt, where he lay stretched on the ground, the bosom of Mother Earth shudder beneath his own.

CHAPTER XVIII

ONCE again Jean was seated at the domestic board, between Denise and her father. Once again he saw the grey twilight creep over the wood panelling, dim the gilding of the barometer, linger in the whiteness of the curtains. Once again he watched Denise light the heavy porcelain lamp, caught the reflection of the flame on the tablecloth and the faces of his companions, while the windows darkened as night fell. Everyday sights, monotonous rites of the evening hour, humble, inanimate objects,—the old-fashioned stove, the stags' heads, the lithographs in their brown frames,—how fondly Jean Favières gazed on the picture, soon to be ennobled by the glamour of memory!

What a power these things would possess to help him to recreate mentally the little world of Mondouze, the grey room where, night after night, Denise Cayrol would kindle the same lamp, with the same gesture, in the same half light. Let the exile but shut his eyes, to exclude new surroundings from his life, and straightway these images would crowd on his brain and set the fountain of tears and heartache flowing.

The doctor was very silent, saddened by the thought of the parting he had himself insisted on. The protecting instinct, which was so strongly developed in him and which had taken alarm on Denise's behalf only, was now clamouring in favour of the young guest who had come to ask life of him, and whom he was dismissing, full of hope and confidence, with death lurking within his bosom.

"I have done all I was bound to, all I could do. My conscience is at peace."

Nevertheless, he was sad at heart, and Lapeyrie tried in vain to cheer their last meal together and throw off the weight of silence and gloom that oppressed them.

Françounette came in to inform Denise that Fortunade was going home, having tied up all the parcels and packed all the trunks. She would be back in the morning at six o'clock, with the ass and the *charretou*, to fetch the luggage.

"Tell her to wait a moment!"

She was already at the garden gate; Denise caught her up there, and they began to talk in a whispered conversation.

Fortunade was protesting weakly :

"It's because of Monsieur Cayrol, Mademoiselle, I durst not do it. If ever he should find out! He would be so, so angry!"

"Then you refuse?"

"Can I refuse *you* anything? But suppose the old man won't consent? He hates Monsieur Cayrol, does old Veydrenne, ever since he was had up before the Court."

"The old man will speak to his son, and you will tell me what he says. Nobody will know I sent you, and whom you asked the remedy for. After all, my father has attended the man, Martial Veydrenne, and I myself have done him kindnesses."

"But, Mademoiselle, if you put no faith in the *metje's* remedies,—you have told me so a hundred times over,—why do you want——"

The objection was so forcible that Mademoiselle Cayrol was disconcerted for the moment. Without giving a direct answer, but darting a look of extraordinary determination at the girl, she put the question :

"Will you do it, or will you not?"

Her face grew hard and her eyes assumed a dark, stern look. Fortunade was cowed, and drawing her shawl round her with a gesture she often had as if she were cold :

"I will go, Mademoiselle. You shall know by to-morrow morning what Martial said."

"He was working at Saint-Dumine. You know the road he will take to come back? Or perhaps he will be at the inn?"

"Not at our place. He never goes there now; I did not like seeing him there."

"At any rate you know where to find him, how to talk to him. You often see him."

"Sometimes, Mademoiselle; but" (here Fortunade blushed) "I only talk to him to do him good."

"I am sure of that. Ah! Fortunade, you are a saint; nobody but you has ever won that ill-con-

ditioned fellow's respect. All the same, I should not dare to send you to see him, if——But there's no other way, Fortunade, there's no other way now. And I long, oh ! I long to see Jean again ! ”

She hurried back to the house, while Fortunade went off in the direction of the village, full of many thoughts.

The long evening came to an end ; Jean and Denise exchanged their usual good-night, under the eyes of Cayrol and Lapeyrie. Before turning in, the doctor went into the young man's room, to give him a few friendly words of advice and encouragement.

Then silence fell on the house. But only Françonnette and M. Lapeyrie were asleep. Cayrol was pondering certain words, certain gestures, of his daughter's, and thinking to himself :

“ Yes, yes ; it was high time ! ”

Jean was sobbing softly, his head buried in the pillow, crying his heart out unashamed, that he might be brave to-morrow. He was dreaming of the future, to give himself courage.

But Denise was not weeping. Seated on her bed, her feet on the ground, her long hair half unbound, she was following in fancy Fortunade and Veydrenne. There was room in her mind for only one thought, one unimaginable hope : “ I want him to live, cost what it will ! ”

The moonlight flooded the floor and bathed the girl's bare feet in a white radiance. She shook the long plait that hung down her back, and stood up, a snowy shape between the red stuff curtains of the bed.

She recalled the charming habit Jean had of kissing every night the wall that divided them, though no sound could penetrate the solid masonry. By day, their wills formed another wall between their lips. Jean Favières was tortured by the deprivation, for he had known in other days the savour of a loving woman's lips, and a craving for these delights of the flesh unconsciously stirred him still. But the phantom caress was enough to satisfy Denise, whose senses were carried away already by the bliss of being loved and were hardly awake yet after the long lethargy of her maidenhood.

Nevertheless to-day her lover's embrace and the words he said had moved her strangely. She had forgotten he was no true fiancé, that she would never be his wife, that the romance of their love-making was ended, in tears and barren regrets, in the hyacinth dell. And then, why this heart-sickness, this despair, this revolt at the prospect of the loneliness of a life in which Jean would no longer bear a part, this mad appeal to Fortunade Brandou's help? Denise, the sane, the clear-sighted Denise, was she "hoist with her own petard"? having deceived another, was she deceiving herself? by dint of copying Jean's ways of speaking, was she beginning to think and feel like him, to entertain the same false hopes as he did? Worse than that,—she was stultifying, by what she did, the creed of her father! Brought up to reverence scientific knowledge, she was sending an emissary to old Veydrenne, the wizard, the charlatan, the man who hated Doctor Cayrol!

Yet she felt no surprise and no remorse; Fortunade was not more simple, more credulous than she had grown, a very woman ready to sacrifice every principle to the craving that possessed her.

"And why not?" she asked herself. "When official science owns itself powerless, why not claim succour of the forces the savants know nothing of? They exist, these forces! Privileged beings, who have never studied in the schools, can perhaps divine them, utilize them? Physicians master the morbid will-power of neuropathic patients; why should not the 'wise men' of the Monédières be able to 'bar in' the wolf* and cast a spell over the man they hate? Surely there may be particles of truth in the morass of popular superstitions! Ah! if only I could save Jean! see Jean again!"

Her bosom swelled with a flood of infinite tenderness. Standing there, in the fading moonlight, she shook with a sudden terror, and with closed lids and open arms, she laid her lips timidly to the wall.

* The shepherds of the Monédières claim that by means of certain cabalistic words they can "bar in" the wolf, that is to say, force the animal to stand motionless, paralyzed, in the very middle of the flock.

CHAPTER XIX

FORTUNADE, avoiding the village and the roads where belated wayfarers or cattle returning from the fields might be encountered, ran like a goat across the wet meadows, and along the edges of the growing wheat. Plunging into the woods that adjoin the park-lands of Saint-Dumine,—groves of chestnuts that forced their way through the rocky soil and sandy pine-woods, she slackened speed, smoothed down her hair, pinned her shawl together, and assumed the staid appearance of a work-girl returning home at the end of her day's toil.

At one time she would have gone to find Martial Veydrenne without any diffidence or hesitation; but since he had been working as a woodman and charcoal-burner, she had quite left off seeing him. In her simplicity, she believed him saved for good, resolved to earn his living honestly, and happy in the resolve; convinced he had no further need of her, she had rather lost interest in his concerns.

She saw him coming a great way off down the hollow way where the sand reflected the wan sky, and he struck her imagination as very big and terrible, with his dingy felt, his ragged waistcoat

and the long-handled axe he carried over his shoulder. He walked heavily; yet his great boots never disturbed a stone, and, advancing without a sound, in the soundless silence, he noted the faintest flutter of the thousand living things that fare abroad after nightfall.

He guessed it was Fortunade, even before he made out the slender form in the dark dress, and he halted, barring the road, firmly planted on his sturdy legs. His hand was inside his waistcoat, feeling between shirt and skin for the golden pheasant he had brought with him from Saint-Dumine; the bird had escaped from the aviary there, and had been promptly knocked over and secreted not fifty yards from where M. Noillac was standing!

"Good-evening to you, Veydrenne! You're going home, eh? I'm back from a day's job, too."

"Good-day, Fortunade! Which way are you bound?"

"Why, for Monadouze, of course. My road's not yours, but that's no reason I shouldn't bid you a good-night, in passing. And tell me now, what is it you're doing? They say Madame wants to cut down the big oak at the park end."

"It was felled to-day."

"The wood won't be good for anything, this time of year. Is it true it was rotten?"

"Not over and above bad, anyway."

They set off again, walking side by side.

"Well, here's the hot weather come," remarked the girl.

"Yes, but we want a drop of rain."

"Rain for the wheat, ay!"

"And for the 'green stuff' too, for sure! The vegetables make a poor show."

She was swinging the black cord from which her scissors hung, trying to look like a girl who fears nothing. She chatted about the weather and the crops, as country manners demand, but she was anything but at her ease, for Veydrenne's face looked black and dangerous.

For several days he had been in this irritable, angry temper, which vented itself in ugly speeches on the smallest provocation and senseless threats of what he would do to Beneytou and Noailac.

"And your father?" asked Fortunade, by way of agreeable conversation. "He's quite well?"

"Yes, he's very well."

"He's a wonderful man for his age; we don't see many to match him nowadays."

Veydrenne spoke in a milder tone:

"Ah! it's his head's not good for much, now," he said almost sadly. "There's times he doesn't know where he is, or who's talking to him! Such a hard life he's had, poor chap!"

"It's a sad thing for you. If he was ill, your old father, you must let me know, Martial Veydrenne! I'd surely come and see him, you know."

"You never come near us nowadays."

"Ah! My good man, I have my work to do, and then there's my mother, and the youngsters. It all takes up time. All the same I'd like to come to your place once in a way."

"When, eh?"

"Some day soon."

The man muttered :

"You used to come in the snow, after nightfall, to bring me eggs and *gogues*, when I was on my back with my broken leg. You were afraid of nothing; you didn't feel the cold."

He settled his axe on his shoulder and came to a stand :

"Fortunadoune?"

"What?"

"You never come now."

"You are cured."

"Do come again."

"Don't I tell you: 'some day soon'?"

He made a sudden movement; but she stood her ground, looking him straight in the eyes. Half-savage as he was, he was like a ferocious dog, quickly lashed to rage by the terror it inspires, but cowed by the quiet courage of even the weakest. Many a time Veydrenne had been almost afraid of Fortunade.

He had never laid a finger on her. She inspired him with a respect that was not solely made up of gratitude for her kindness, and admiration for her courage,—a respect akin to that felt towards certain innocent creatures; to touch them brings misfortune. Fortunade was Veydrenne's living fetish.

He was far from understanding *why* the girl had been so kind and helpful to him. She wanted nothing of him; and—more surprising still—he wanted nothing of her, nothing of what men ask of

women. When she sat down in the *cantou* and announced: "You must do this or that, Martial Veydrenne," he might answer readily enough: "You're making game of me, Fortunade; I'm not the man for suchlike jobs! I want my liberty;" but there was something in the child's looks that forced him to do as she pleased. From one thing to another she had driven him like a sheep wherever she chose; she had put the halter round his neck. And he had bowed to the yoke,—why, he hardly knew. His vocabulary was too limited! he could not think out these hard questions. Words failed him; he could only swear savagely.

He was ashamed,—yes, ashamed to work, to take a taskmaster's money, to come and go under orders. He felt humiliated, almost remorseful, to live like this against the grain of his natural instincts. But it was all inextricably confused in his mind, and he only half knew what he did feel.

Then, directly he set to work, the girl had left off coming to Le Chastang. Was it a woman's caprice—or what was it? He missed her visits, and out of this regret grew a grudge that would swell and swell into downright hate as little by little the almost supernatural awe Fortunade inspired faded away. And with this resentment already began to mingle dim promptings of the man's carnal nature. The time was drawing nigh when the girl would no longer be mysterious, intangible as the swallow, the cricket, the ladybird.

But that time was not yet come.

Veydrenne plodded on again, while his companion

kept the conversation on the subject of the old *metje*, who was so wise once upon a time.

"Is it true he used to 'forge' sick folks?"

"Yes, they laid them on the anvil, between four candles, and the hammer beat, beat alongside 'em."

"And that cured the spleen?"

"Never failed! And the pining fever in children too."

"Holy Virgin! And chest complaint?"

"Ah! as for that, I don't know."

"There was some other secret?"

"May be."

"A herb?"

"I tell you I don't know."

"You couldn't find out?"

"Why?"

"I should like——"

"Is there someone ill at home?"

"No."

Then, after a moment's hesitation, she went on resolutely:

"It's for the Parisian at Cayrol's."

Veydrenne broke into a sneering laugh:

"He has his doctor handy. No need for you to meddle!"

"Then you won't?"

He shrugged and muttered something unintelligible between his teeth; then, without a moment's warning, he burst out furiously:

"Be off with you! If you only came for that, clear out!"

Fortunade drew herself up:

"I did not come for that. It was only a passing thought. Now, as you want me to go,—good-bye!"

"No, don't go."

She was already ten yards away; but he caught her up again.

"Don't go; by God! don't go like that!"

Once more she looked him in the face, her eyes soft and serious, and spoke his name:

"Martial Veydrenne!"

His heart seemed to stop beating! he had never felt anything like it before! A moment ago he longed to strangle the slip of a girl who dared to make fun of him, to laugh in his face. Now there he stood before her, as weak and foolish as a naughty child of five.

"Don't be angry, Fortunade. The old man won't do it."

"He will if you ask him."

"You talk to him, this Parisian?"

"I've not spoken twenty words to him in my life. But he's a Christian like the rest of us. If Monsieur Cayrol and your father came into collision in the Courts, 'twas no fault of the poor boy's. You don't want to die either, do you? When I was good to you in your illness, you were glad enough to have me there. Well, what I did for you, you do for him. God will reward you!"

"You talk like a Curé."

"I have never asked you for a thing, Martial Veydrenne, and you know you told me: 'I should like to see you happy. You always look so weakly and puling.' And now, when I beg you to do me a

favour, you answer me brutally."

He hung his head, vexed and unhappy.

"Then you'll come and see us again? You'll speak to the old man yourself? Bring him a bit of bacon and a drop of white wine! that'll put him in a good temper. And don't say a word about its being for the Parisian at Cayrol's."

She quickened her pace, for the falling dusk was beginning to enclose them in its meshes. The tree-frogs were croaking beside the lake. A downy whirr of wings and a cry like the wail of a new-born infant showed the owl was abroad after prey.

The grey was verging into black under the dark parasols of the pines, but towards the east the sky was still of a dark blue. A strange light, perhaps the reflection of some fire a very long way off, gave a purple tinge to this lighter band of colours.

"Don't go so fast, Fortunade!"

"It is late. My mother's waiting for me. And I shan't be able to see my way."

"It will be light enough in a moment. Look; there comes the 'wolf's sun.'"

The moon was just rising, her red disk showing between the low branches of the pines. Dulled at first by the mists of the horizon, she climbed the sky, brighter and more silvery every minute.

She threw her uncertain light over the endless expanse of hill and dale, and the heathery uplands where the shepherds roam with their little brown mountain sheep and their huts on wheels. She penetrated the depths of the chestnut woods, to set the waters of hidden springs sparkling and to endow

them with mysterious virtues. She peeped in at the windows of stables and cattle-byres, and between the drawn curtains of bedchambers. At this very moment she was bathing Denise Cayrol's bare feet in soft radiance. Bayed at by farm dogs, greeted by the noisy hordes of bull-frogs, this May moon was at once the traveller's lantern, the poacher's accomplice, the lover's confidante. The great grey wolf, squatting in the forest-clearing where his bitch and cubs danced in the pale moonlight, howled a salutation to the trusty comrade of his nocturnal prowls.

On the sandy track Veydrenne's shadow persistently dogged Fortunade's steps; now tall and meagre, now short and squat, huddling about his heels, like some grotesque hobgoblin. The child was all but running, shuddering under the spells of night, moonlight and man's wickedness, which seemed banded together against her. *He* did not need to run; with long, swinging strides he easily maintained his place, just a step behind her.

"Fortunade!"

Terror, such as she had never known in the blackest nights on the wild uplands of the Champs de Brach, gripped her by the throat and bowed her knees under her. Yet Veydrenne was not speaking menacingly; rather his low, hoarse tones had an accent of supplication.

But now the pines began to fall farther apart, while the more open ground was carpeted with thick, coarse grasses and flowers underneath a growth of young trees with light-coloured stems, birches and beeches. Now the houses of a hamlet

could just be made out; every window was dark, but the fragrance from the cottage-gardens was unmistakable.

"Don't rush on so! your petticoats aren't a-fire! What are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"I don't mean you any hurt."

"What harm should you mean me?"

She spoke rather breathlessly, her right hand holding back her skirts, which the hawthorns kept catching, her left feeling in her apron pocket for the rosary the sisters at Tulle had blessed and given her. But, albeit trembling and overwrought, Fortunade still remained mistress of herself, and was able to answer in a voice that betrayed few signs of the tumult raging within.

The shoulder of a hill hid the moon, and in the darkened underwoods detached sparkles of green fire appeared. Under the leaves was a continual rustle as of falling rain, caused by millions of insects calling to each other with the shrill crepitation of their wing-cases. Born an hour before, they were enjoying one brief spell of music and light and joy, and were already beginning to die in their hundreds and thousands.

To the west, where bars of purple light still lingered, marking the spot where the sun had set, the phosphorescent sky throbbed like an opening and closing eye. A scent of storm was in the air, mingling with the woodland odours and the fragrance of the flowers. According to the direction of the shifting wind and the nearness of the gardens, a

succession of perfumes predominated,—the bitter almond of the hawthorns, the vanilla and honey of the acacias, the cold, thin aroma of the hyacinth, the strong, sturdy savour of the elders with their broad leaves as white as milk. Then in a moment the king of the nights of May, the great mauve lilac absorbed the balmy breaths of all the rest in his own overmastering sweetness, filling gardens, woods, all the space under heaven, with the wind of his hot, feverish fragrance.

Fortunade, her senses shut against the enchantments of the night, her whole soul throbbing with brief, unspoken prayers to heaven, heard nothing of the words her pursuer stammered in her ear. He was a mere object of horrid terror, an invisible, unspeakable monster, whose poisonous breath burned on her neck, her back, the hem of her skirt.

A hand touched her ; she uttered a frantic cry : “ Holy Virgin, help me ! ”

A clearing opened before her ; a few yards away the window of a hovel made a little square of dim, smoky light. A dog barked, and a man, sitting on a bench beside the door, shouted loudly : “ Down, Fidèle, down ! ”

Fortunade was on the open highway, clear of the grim abyss of encompassing darkness and bewildering scents into which Veydrenne plunged again, muttering half-heard maledictions.

The peasant came up to the garden-fence :

“ Is it you, Fortunade Brandou ? Did I hear you scream ? ”

“ I’m on my way home from the Château.

Something moved in the wood. I was frightened."

"Ah! my poor lass, it wants a bit of courage to go alone this time of night, it does! I'll set you a bit on your way."

"Thank you, thank you; I won't say no. As far as the bridge of Monadouze, merely."

But she was thinking to herself:

"Holy Virgin! My head's all whirling; and I feel as if I were going to die. From what horrors have you saved me?"

CHAPTER XX

CAYROL took his daughter by the arm :
"Come, dear."

She was watching the plume of steam slowly melting away in the morning mist.

"The train is clean out of sight. Come, dear."

He led her away. These farewells, Jean's overflowing gratitude, his aspirations for a speedy return, and now this coldness, this depression, this silence on Denise's part,—how it all saddened him! He was thinking :

"Yes, it was high time! She, too, was letting her feelings overmaster her. Now the danger is removed for the present. She will think over things and see that I have done right in choosing the lesser of two evils. After all, if Favières will only stick to the treatment and avoid imprudences, his life will not be shortened by a single day because he has left us. I have told him so ; and I have told Denise the same. *He* believed me ; she does not. She is convinced she is indispensable to the lad, that, away from her, he will commit a hundred follies. It is quite likely he will ; but he will be responsible, and nobody else. I shall have done my duty."

He longed to say out what he thought, and so

break the ice that had been forming between Denise and himself, ever since he had decided on Jean's departure; but he dared not. His daughter had accepted his decision without protest. A painful and shamefaced hesitation had postponed from day to day the explanation, which was now useless.

Jean was gone; soon Denise would have gone too. They would not meet again before autumn, perhaps later. Between now and then new faces and new objects would interpose between them. The morbid spell of fond pity that is akin to love, would perhaps be broken. And if it were not, Cayrol would find a pretext not to receive Jean in his house again.

In the vestibule the reclining chair, of canvas and bamboo, had been set up against the wall; Denise caught sight of it, and a spasm of pain swept over her face.

"Where are you going?" asked her father.

"Upstairs; Françonnette is scouring out the white room."

"Shall we have déjeuner early? I will take you in to Tulle; we can go to the *Galeries Nouvelles*, and buy materials for your summer frocks. You will have your time free to work for yourself now. You must look your best, and have some pleasure. After so much trying work, you have well earned a holiday."

He spoke almost timidly. Denise only replied:

"Thank you, father. I will do whatever you wish."

She was already mounting the stairs, and Cayrol heard her calling:

"Fortunade! where are you, Fortunade?"

The girl, perched on a stool, was taking down the curtains in the white room.

"Mademoiselle?"

Denise led her into her own room.

"Well?"

"Well, I have seen him. He says he knows nothing. He wants me to go and speak to the old man."

"When will you go?"

"I should be very sorry to disobey you, Mademoiselle; but go to Le Chastang, alone, oh! I durstn't."

"But you have been once."

"I durstn't go again."

"You are afraid?"

"Yes."

Denise, who had not looked at Fortunade so far, now noticed the poor girl's drawn features, the look of terror that still lingered in her eyes.

"He did me no hurt," said the seamstress in a low tone, as if in answer to the other's unasked question; "but I won't go again, not by myself, to Le Chastang."

"But if I go with you?"

"Ah! then, I'm quite ready."

Denise sighed and took Fortunade's hand in hers:

"Forgive me, child, I ought not to have asked you such a thing. I am grieved I did, now. Thank you from the bottom of my heart—go now, leave me. I shall be better by myself."

She shut to the door behind Fortunade, and did not come down again till déjeuner.

During the day she went with her father to Tulle; but all the time the shopkeeper was displaying his goods for her inspection on the counter and expatiating on their beauties, she vouchsafed only monosyllables in reply; her eyes hardly saw what was before them and her thoughts were far away.

A reassuring telegram from Jean arrived in the evening.

Next day Denise took Fortunade with her to Le Chastang, carrying with them food, a bottle of wine, and a small present of money. On the way they did not meet a soul. When the scattered hovels of the hamlet appeared under the chestnuts, among the water-meadows, wet and dank as always, the Brandou girl stepped on in front by herself. At the Veydrennes' door she made a sign to her companion to wait for her.

A fetid smell of rushes, damp, and reeking cow-house hung heavy in the air. A tangle-headed brat ran out of a tumble-down house, threw a stone at Denise and took to his heels, as swiftly and silently as a water-rat. Fortunade, who had gone inside the hut, reappeared on the threshold and beckoned:

"Come in, the old man is there. I've given him the basket. I spoke to him; but he never answered. He's all queer; look at him. He'll listen to you, perhaps."

Then Denise made her way into the Veydrennes' lair, half-choked by the stench and be-

wildered by the gloom, through which odd-looking shapes loomed. The broken panes of the *fenestrou* had been replaced by newspaper, all yellow and thick with flies. Strings of morels hung from the ceiling and above the fireplace. A screech-owl was nailed against a door, already falling to pieces and losing its feathers. A dog with a shaggy grey coat growled at sight of the stranger; but slunk away at a word from Fortunade.

"Where is the old man?" asked Mademoiselle Cayrol.

"There in the *cantou*" (chimney-corner).

The other dog began to growl from where he lay before the fire. Fortunade took a couple of bones from her basket and threw them to the two animals, which were always half famished and as gaunt as wolves, whose harsh coat, pointed muzzle, pricked ears and bloodshot eyes they had. Savage-eyed familiars of the *metje*, they were old friends of Fortunade's, who never failed to bring them, every time she came, some scraps of broken meat and an occasional lump of sugar. But Denise's presence kept them on the alert.

Undaunted, she stepped forward to the *cantou*, and, peering into the deep shadow, discerned a form dressed in rags. The enormous dirty-white collar of beard, the prognathous jaws, the broad, flat nose, the small eyes, set very close together under the cavernous arches of the brow, recalled the great anthropoid apes one sees cowering in the corner of their cage, mysterious melancholy creatures of captivity.

"Père Veydrenne," she began, "I am Fortunade's friend. We are bringing you some bacon and some good wine, the sort you like. Your son told us to come—because—because——"

Not a word!

"He was eighty-three a week or two ago," put in Fortunade. "His wits are gone. He doesn't understand a word we say. Let's go."

But Denise stood as if spellbound. So this was the famous *metje* of Monadouze, the blacksmith wizard, the master of sorceries and spells, before whom three generations of peasants had trembled. Whether dupe of his own trickeries or artful charlatan, there he was, vanquished by the doctor, the man of books and laboratories, reduced to this state of mere animality which inspired,—surely not compassion, but rather a sense of awe and almost terror.

Isolated on the confines of extreme old age, like a hermit on a mountain-top, outside humanity, outside time, he seemed made of the same stuff as the trees and rocks—bones of stone and muscles of wood, with the face of a brute beast. No doubt he had lost the power of understanding human speech, but he could hear the grass grow and the mole delve, and like his dogs could scent death when it enters into a house or when it takes hold on the vitals of a man.

"Let us go, Mademoiselle," insisted Fortunade. "He can't either see or hear now, and he'll stay like that for days and nights together. All of a sudden he seems to come to life again; he eats and

says a word or two, and then he drops off again and becomes just like a stock or a stone."

They left the hovel, Denise murmuring to herself: "Why ever did I come? What hope of succour could I expect from this rustic *metje*, a common charlatan and a madman? My father would never forgive me for having come to see him, and I cannot fathom my own motives. Truly, Fortunade, my wits have gone astray these last weeks. I long to change the world, I long—nay! I don't know what I long for, what I would have——"

"You would have more peace of mind, Mademoiselle, if you would do God's will," urged Fortunade.

"The child is right in her simple faith," thought Denise to herself, when she was in her own room at home again, worn out and disheartened. "It does not look so, but her pious resignation is of the same mettle as my father's philosophic calm. Both acquiesce in the necessities of existence. One says: 'It is the order of the universe;' the other: 'It is the will of God.' And I, I stand as far aloof from one as from the other. I could never bring myself to believe in a future life, and I cannot bear to think of the extinction of the beings I love. If I contemplate my own death, I am not afraid; but if I think of Jean's, the impossibility I am under of comforting or consoling him overwhelms my spirit."

She burst into tears. Her heart was woe to get back to the straightforward truth. Perhaps, if she confessed everything to the doctor, they might

together find a means of undeceiving Jean, without paining him too unbearably.

That evening, Denise was more affectionate towards her father, and he thought she was recovering her moral balance. But, next day, a letter from her lover renewed Denise's torments. In it Jean proclaimed his passion, exasperated by absence, and spoke wildly of his eager hope to see Denise again soon, never to leave her more, never! He could not understand how he had ever borne to tear himself away from her, how she had had the cruel courage to let him go.

He ended with the words :

"Love me that I may live. If ever your love were withdrawn, I should feel it by the chill in my veins. Oh! Denise, I am in your hands like a lighted candle; breathe tenderly on the flame that is struggling to revive."

She wrote back with many assurances of love and constancy.

Saint Jean, who wards off the lightning, tempers the winds, cleanses the waters, makes the lamb's fleece to grow thick and the fish and fowl to multiply, Saint Jean is more venerated by the peasants of the Limousin than God the Father Himself, and his day was greeted with a mighty ringing of bells and huge bonfires of brushwood. Monadouze duly celebrated the *Lunade*; along the hollow ways where the chestnuts were shedding their pink blossoms, four lads in red gown and surplice carried the barbaric idol of *The Forerunner*,

painted a glaring vermilion, with gilt head-dress and gilt shoes, and carrying a gilt branch in its right hand. Twelve times the procession interrupted its slow progress, which described a wide circuit round the village, to represent the stations of the moon in the cycle of the twelve months. At night, fires blazed on all the hill-tops, the plaintive halting air of the *chabrettes* called the village girls to the dance, and the Brandous' inn was crammed with customers till the false dawn at half past two in the morning.

That same evening a great piece of news leaked out. A gentleman from Paris had concluded a secret purchase of the three waterfalls and the lands on the bank. He was going to enclose the whole of one side of the gorge, from the road downwards, and winding paths were to be constructed, allowing tourists to descend to the level of the "Horse's Tail." A little rustic kiosk was to be built, to serve as a refreshment hut, on the great flat rock overhanging the "Redole." Strangers would soon come flocking to Monadouze, and the gentleman from Paris would make a pocketful of money. The former owners, who had never seen the purchaser, but had sold at a good price without asking any particulars, were now making a grievance of it, as if someone had done them a personal injury. The idea that tourists should pay to see the waterfalls, *their* waterfalls, and that this money should come into a Parisian's pocket, upset all their peasant notions of the fitness of things!

The works were already begun when Made-

moiselle Cayrol left Monadouze. She was not very well, was Françonnette's account, and she was going to Royat to take the waters. The post-mistress and the school-teacher paid her a visit before she went and found her not exactly ill, but a trifle thin and pale and dispirited.

Cayrol's cousin, Madame Desseytre, relict of a University lecturer, was an old lady of a careful and ceremonious temper. She never travelled, because of certain fixed habits which she called love of home and family, and because she hated dust and rain, sun and wind, noise and new faces.

Come June, she always quitted Clermont for her villa at Royat, and every Sunday, winter and summer, at Royat as at Clermont, she welcomed a circle of familiars, exclusively belonging to the University world. Madame Desseytre entertained a fine scorn for all men who were not graduates, and hovered like an anxious mother over the candidates for a degree. Two of her oldest friends, dons who had turned journalists and blossomed into politicians, had been Ministers of Public Instruction. A reflection of their glory still rested on Madame Desseytre's grey hairs; she was a personage at Clermont, and the students made a point of being presented at her receptions.

On these occasions Denise always seemed to wish to keep in the background, to prefer the shade, so to speak. She did the honours of the garden, and poured out tea for the Sunday visitors. Her gentle amiability, which never flagged, discouraged the

curious. Was she merely insignificant, or was there a mystery about her, this tall girl who was so silent, and who listened to all the learned discussions and exchanges of repartee without a sign of either weariness or satisfaction ?

Madame Desseytre told herself :

“ She has quite altered in these five years. She has lost all the fire and gaiety of youth. Girls without a husband have a spring and an autumn, only married women have a long summer.”

She would fain have got Denise married ; but her old friends were too old, and the young men, nourished on the dry crusts of that niggard step-mother, their University, hardly answered the romantic ideal of the disinterested scholar.

Mademoiselle Cayrol lived for two months in a sort of trance. The doctor's hurried letters were hardly read ; she remained indifferent even at the news that Fortunade Brandou had had a dangerous fall into a ditch, and that she still kept her bed in a high fever. A little later, Denise learned that Veydrenne had tried to murder M. Noaillac, and had been arrested by the gendarmes in his hut at Le Chastang. Monadouze and all the past were getting to seem far away, almost strange, to Denise, and even the present seemed unreal. Madame Desseytre, the old professors, the young dons passed before her eyes like figures in a dream.

She was not sorry to have come to Royat, nor did she regret the separation from her father. She just waited, and the long torture of her suspense irritated her sick nerves and preyed on her strength.

Every day brought her nearer to an unthinkable, inevitable crisis, Jean's cure or Jean's death, which would decide—one way or another—*her* fate.

So day succeeded day, and letter followed letter, and the nightmare went on and on, without a soul at Madame Desseytre's suspecting anything. A fever of suspense till the postman has been, a brief respite after the letters are read, a laborious answer where each word has to be weighed, more anxious, torturing thoughts that will not be banished and even in sleep gnaw at her heart-strings like a little mouse's teeth. Jean is better . . . Jean is not so well. He is leaving Sauveterre. He is staying with his mother and father-in-law. He says he is starting for Royat. He consents to abandon the project, but the delay is getting on his nerves, maddening him. He is attacked once more by the doubts and fears of earlier days. A lover's jealousy is added to the selfish anxiety of the invalid. Thus each day's letter brought a budget of news that contradicted yesterday's.

Every hour of the day, in her own room or in the salon, at the Casino or out walking, Denise was ever listening for her doomed lover's despairing summons. Sometimes she would start and turn pale, as if someone had voiced it just behind her.

Towards the middle of August the letters grew calmer in tone. Jean was still at Nîmes, at his mother's; only he complained bitterly that Madame Fabre wanted to send him back to the sanatorium at Sauveterre, while she went to Germany to bring home her younger boy; "not for worlds, you know,

would they have left that precious infant in the same house where, even convalescent, even cured, *I breathe.*" The letter concluded :

"As they dread the notion of my being all alone, I am going home to Arles, to occupy the house that belongs to me there, that belongs to *us*, dear, and which I mean to have put in order and furnished for us. It is an old house in the Quartier des Arènes, near the ruined amphitheatre; it has an inner courtyard in which grows a stunted orange tree that never fruits. In the middle a spring of water flows into a stone trough that must once have been a Roman sarcophagus. Two worthy souls, Marius and Mion, like figures out of a picture Bible, look after the place, which came to me from my grandmother. It would make them happy to wait on me, and, if need be, to nurse me. Oh! how I should love to visit Arles, with you, Denise! It is a melancholy, beautiful city, far more romantic, far more *sympathetic*, than your Tulle; you would learn to be another woman there, my wife! The more I think of it, the more passionate is my longing to spend a few days alone in this house, where we shall pass our wedding-night. Ah! Denise, once you have crossed its threshold, the note of the fountain will no longer be melancholy. You will find in the presses gowns of a bygone fashion, muslin neckerchiefs, ribands of embroidered velvet. You will arrange your hair in broad plaits, crowned by the little velvet diadem of the Arlésiennes, and I will call you Mireille.

"Do not laugh at my poor fancies. They fire my

blood, they torture me ; but still they are my life, for they give you back to me ! Ah ! if only you knew how your chill, sisterly solicitude hurts ! ”

She wrote back :

“ I fear the loneliness of the old house for you ; yes, the old servants will nurse you faithfully, no doubt, but judiciously, skilfully ? My advice is, go back to Sauveterre. ”

Two days later Jean's answer came : he was safe at Arles, full of health and spirits.

Then suddenly the letters stopped.

CHAPTER XXI

MADEMOISELLE CAYROL,
I write to ask you to come at once. Monsieur Jean has been very ill for three days. He has caught a fever and a chill, we do not know how. The doctor says it may end badly. Monsieur Jean has forbidden us to write to his relations. He said, to you first, to beg you to come, because he longs to see you. And we say the same, you cannot refuse our poor master who loves you so. He fancies he is married to you when he is delirious, and we cannot help crying when we hear him. We will meet you at the station. If you do not come, Monsieur Jean says he will go and fetch you, even if he has to die on the road,—and he would do what he says. He is the sort who cannot bear to wait.

Your obedient servant,

MION LABASTIDE.

CHAPTER XXII

THE carriage rolled along the dusty boulevard. Denise, who looked worn out with anxiety and a sleepless night, asked :

“How did he fall ill?”

Mion Labastide wiped her eyes. She had a fine wrinkled face like St. Anne in an Italian picture, and wore the black diadem of the women of Arles over her plaits of silver hair. Her gestures were bold and graceful, and when she spoke, her narrative became a drama, interspersed with dialogue and full of fire and incident.

“He talked of changing the furniture in the house. Our baker,—*sala bestia*!—stops him in the street one morning: ‘Seeing you’re so fond of old wood-work, you should go out to a farm I know Montmajour way: there’s a bedstead more beautiful than the one in the “Birth of the Saviour” in the Arles museum and a bread-butck so old, so old it was made before Queen Jeanne’s days.’—‘Well,’ says Jean, ‘order a carriage from the hotel, Marius; we will drive over to Montmajour this afternoon.’ ‘The sun’s cruel hot, Monsieur, and the wind’s in the south; we might easy have a storm; suppose we wait till to-morrow!’ But the baker—*sala*

bestia !—he sneers : ‘ There’s some English milords have been talking to the farmer already about the stuff.’ So Jean declares : ‘ When I want a thing, I must have it right away ; go and order the carriage, Marius. What care I for wind and sun and storm ? ’ ”

“ You paint him to the life ! ” sighed Denise.

Mion Labastide went on :

“ Well, the storm burst, and the rain fell in torrents on the open carriage,—and no shelter anywhere but the olives in the stony fields. The coachman threw his cloak over Jean’s shoulders ; but by the time they got home, the poor fellow was chilled to the bone. Then a high fever, and he was delirious all night. Next day he vomited blood, which frightened us horribly.”

Denise shuddered :

“ And he, was he frightened ? ”

“ He turned like a saint of wax when he saw the blood. I told him, to relieve his mind : ‘ It’s the coughing, you know, inflames the throat. The bad blood once away you’ll be better ! ’ But ‘ No ! ’ said he, ‘ no, Mion ; you can’t deceive me ; it’s my chest is torn in two. That blood means my death. Don’t write to my mother ; the letter would not reach her in time, as she is travelling. And anyway, she will always know the truth soon enough. It is not my mother I want to see. Write to my fiancée.’ Then he dropped off to sleep ; but directly he woke : ‘ Have you written, Mion ? ’—‘ I don’t know the young lady’s name and address.’ ‘ You will find a sheet of paper in my pocket-book ; her name

and address are on it. She will come at once, and you must go to meet her at the station.'—'And how am I to know her, when I have never seen her?'—'She is the most beautiful of women. She wears her hair plaited in a crown, and it is the loveliest gold ever seen.'—I know he was not dreaming, because I found the paper. Then I wrote. Your telegram arrived last night; and Jean has had a better night. This morning he wanted to get up; the hope of seeing you" (this she said with great seriousness) "the hope of seeing you gives him back his strength. He loves you."

"And the doctor, what does *he* say?"

"*Ai!* the doctor! How should he know? He told Marius: 'The end is not far off,' and Jean got up to-day!"

"My father declared, 'Sooner or later he will be sure to do something imprudent.'"

Mion Labastide's letter had reached her two days before, and Denise had quickly made up her mind. She recalled the vision of Jean in the hyacinth dell, when he pressed her to his heart and she quivered with tender emotion as a real fiancée might. On that occasion he had said: "If I was worse, if I sent for you, would you come?" And she had answered: "Yes, I swear I would."

Now the summons had come. Serious or no, their betrothal gave him a hold on Denise: he looked upon her as his, and she had promised herself to him. Any mental reservations she might have made could not relieve her of the obligation to

fulfil loyally the part she had accepted. Till Jean's death, she was his fiancée, in fact, if not in heart.

Nay, was not her heart perhaps more deeply touched, did she not love Jean Favières better than she thought?

But she would have no more concealments. At the risk of incurring the doctor's blame, of rousing his anger, she would tell him of her departure for Arles. And besides, what could her father find to fear, what possible jealousy could he entertain now? Jean belonged to the past, he stood on the threshold of that solemn region which imposes on the living an obligation of silence and forgiveness.

She wrote:

"DEAR FATHER,

"Your fears were well founded. Our poor Jean is dying. The woman who is nursing him prays me to go and see him in his house at Arles, where he is all alone,—for his tender-hearted mother is on her travels! You yourself would never forbid my giving this gratification to an unhappy being who loved us dearly. I am starting directly. I shall stay there a few hours only, and return at once to Monadouze. After so sad and agitating a time, the life I lead at Royat would be too painful.

"I am telling my cousin. Do not be anxious, I shall see you soon. A thousand loving kisses.

"DENISE."

Now she is in Jean Favières' town. Boulevards planted with planes, yellow-washed houses above

which towers a Romanesque steeple, narrow streets paved with pebbles from the river, where the ill-hung carriage jolts and rattles. Broad-shouldered, straight-featured women, seated before the doors, watch Mion Labastide going by with Denise and call to each other with their serious voices in their Provençal Latin. The wind is getting up and raises the dust in eddies, scattering it in fine ashes over the red roofs, the plane-trees, the clothes of the passers-by. A church-bell rings drowsily, and the ennui of a summer Sunday settles down on the silent city, lying hot and tired under the fierce sun.

A lane opening on one corner of the huge mass of the Arènes,* whose rows of arches one above the other cut the almost ultramarine blue of the August sky.

"We are there, *té!* This is the house, and there, there's the baker,—*sala bestia!*"

Mion makes the baker responsible for everything! Behind the blind of plaited string, eager eyes are on the look out. But old Marius is on the alert too; hardly has the carriage stopped before the arched door set with massive nails is thrown open.

Denise is blind to everything now,—she sees neither the courtyard nor the winding stone stairs nor the intricate passages. Her eyes are clouded. And then she hears Jean's voice!

* The ruins of the Roman Amphitheatre at Arles.

CHAPTER XXIII

HE was seated near the window in a great armchair packed with cushions, the same as in other days at Monadouze, and Denise sat on a low stool close beside him.

How long had they been sitting thus? Hours had slipped by. Twice over Mion Labastide had opened the door to ask: "Where am I to take Mademoiselle's valise?" But Jean had told her: "Presently we will see about it, leave us alone for a while." Now the sun was gilding the crest of the red roof-tiles that bounded the view on the opposite side of the narrow street. Below, the clear blue grey of the twilight was creeping up the house-fronts from pavement to doors, from doors to balconies. Only the roofs were still illuminated. A stray sunbeam striking through the window-panes fell on Jean's hand where it lay on Denise's hair, pale ivory on a golden cushion, and, shooting like a fiery arrow across the room, broke in a blaze of glory on the purple bed hangings.

It was an enormous bed, with a very low footrail and a very high headboard, elaborately carved, though without figures, in hard walnut wood that showed curious wavy lines and spiral markings.

The counterpane of garnet damask descended to the floor on either side. A bronze crucifix hung at the bed's head, while to right and left were two portraits in oils representing Jean's great-grandfather and great-grandmother, the one clean-shaven, in a long-skirted coat of the days of Louis Philippe and a double-knotted cravat, the other wearing on her head the little yellow foulard of a well-to-do farmer's wife and a tulle fichu over a black dress. A beam of the evening sunlight lit up these naive works of art, and the two faces seemed to be watching their great-grandson and the "strange woman," his betrothed, with eyes of suspicion.

Jean whispered :

"Go on talking! I love to hear your voice."

"I have told you everything there is to tell. I am tired, Jean, tired out. I have suffered so in these last three days! Mion's letter made me fear the worst. But I was agreeably surprised when I saw you. The immediate danger is warded off; the crisis is pretty well over."

She was lying deliberately and her face contradicted her almost gleeful tones.

"Ah! bad boy that you are, wicked child; you have forgotten all my advice and all your promises!"

"I followed it, followed your advice for three months as faithfully as a Monk observes the rules of his Order. But I was doing *too* well! I was too overjoyed in beautifying this house for you, alas!"

"I have not seen it yet, this house of yours. Presently, when the doctor comes——"

"My house? *Your* house, Denise. It will belong to you very soon. I shall make a will."

"Oh! Jean!"

"It is perfectly natural. You are my wife. Everything I possess is yours."

"You will make a marriage-deed, dear Jean, and give me the house as a wedding-gift. Why are you so dismal? It is very bad. Once upon a time, when you had fits of depression, I could always manage to make you smile. Why not now? Am *I* changed, grown less clever, or less loved?"

"Dear! dearest! Never was there a brighter light of love in your eyes. You are the very same Denise I loved the first evening I saw you, the first time I heard your dear voice, and leant for support on your hand. I lean on it still."

"And the hand is sure and trusty; it will never be withdrawn, never fail you."

"It is only *I* am changed, and all in a few days! Last week I was still hearty. Now——"

He lifted his hand so that it intercepted the sun-beam between the window and Denise, and the strong light shone through the sunken flesh clothing the bones that were so easily discerned under the wan, semi-transparent skin. The hand, which had once summed up Jean's moral and physical being, and indicated temperament, disposition and character, had lost almost all distinctive individuality now; it was the typical hand of the consumptive, deformed and reshaped by the disease, the fingers flattened out at the tips, the nails dulled and falling away.

"And that, Denise! look at that! I am done with

self-delusion. But never despair, beloved. The end will be quite peaceful. I had only one wish,—to see you again, to hear from you those words of love that cradle the soul and lull it tenderly to sleep. You are here ; you love me ; you will mourn for me. Then I strive no more ! I am resigned. I am not afraid at all ; I am even now more than half detached from life. One by one the ties break that bind me to it. I am going away ; the thought is almost soothing——”

Denise was more alarmed by this serenity than she would have been at any violence, any railing against fate. She knew that the will to live can prolong life, against all probability. But Jean was acquiescing in his doom !

“I let you talk nonsense, because it would tire me too much to contradict you !” she declared. “Directly you have recovered some strength I will come back for you, and we will return to Monadouze. I have told my father of my journey here. Later we will tell him everything ; I insist upon it. He will be a trifle jealous to begin with, however——”

“Denise, you are sublime, but you are deceiving me ! I do not believe you, and yet I love to hear you laying plans for the future, and saying, ‘*We will do this, we will do that.*’ What a true woman you are, how you hit on the very word that strikes home, the subtle argument that convinces ! I see your true, your essential nature laid bare ; you are superlative, you are divine in your motherliness.” (He stifled a sigh). “Why did I ever ask aught else of you but this motherly tenderness ? Why did I

make love to you as men,—healthy, strong men,—make love to young and beautiful women? For I have always loved you, I love you still, with a jealous, covetous passion, a man's passion, alas!—no, I ought never to have done it. It may be I am very blameworthy towards you. I have never realised it till this moment. How selfish I have been! But now I see myself and I see you clearly. The end of life is like the close of day,—a calm light, a great silence. And things present a different aspect to what they do at midday, they have another meaning. Do you understand?"

"I love you, Jean. I know nothing else; and I am yours, all yours."

"Don't say those words, Denise."

He closed his heavy lids. Kneeling at his feet, she pressed his hands, and sometimes raised them, his poor wasted hands, to her lips. Almost mechanical as was the gesture, it had all the purity of pity, all the fervency of love! Her touch seemed to galvanize Jean; he opened his eyes and his face recovered a momentary look of youth and charm and ardour.

"Beloved!"

"You were weaker than you are to-day when you first came to us! I can remember the look on your face. Yet three months after we were careering along the country roads. Keep a good heart! We shall see the Champs de Brach again, and the Habiterelle and the dear lake of Saint-Dumine. Father has kept the pony-carrage for you. Your room is ready for you."

"What a witch you are, Denise! I cannot help

telling myself: 'Perhaps she is right. To-morrow I shall believe every word she says.' Ah! to live."

His eyes closed again:

"Talk to me, cozen me, lie to me!"

At seven o'clock Mion Labastide announced the doctor. Denise left the room; she had come to the end of her strength.

The landings on each floor ended in two open loggias one above the other, giving on one side of the little inner court. The flowering orange-tree breathed its luscious scent in the girl's nostrils where she stood leaning her elbows on the balustrade of the first floor. All the lower part of the courtyard was already wrapt in blue haze, but the water in the basin of the fountain reflected the pale sky, flecked with clouds and streaked with the fires of sunset. A thread of crystal spouted from an antique mask, described a perfect curve like a silver bow fully bent and fell into a brimming trough which was shaped like a coffin. The lid with its six fluted ornaments that betrayed the Gallo-Roman origin of the sarcophagus, lay on the ground among the shapely leaves of the half-withered burdocks.

In the other corner of the courtyard rose the dark spindle of a tall cypress.

Denise went down and bent over the fountain. Her shadow darkened the shining surface of the water, and she seemed to see herself lying in the narrow coffin. Everything about her took on a fatal, funereal aspect,—the trough, the water for ever running away, the two trees, orange and cypress, symbols of love and death.

"Ah! my poor Jean!" she thought, "what a sadness broods over this house that was to have witnessed our marriage! When I am in it I feel somehow less alive than elsewhere, more detached from all that is not you,—yet at the same time nearer you yourself than I have ever been!"

The doctor crossed the landing. He was an old, rough-mannered man, who frowned when he saw Denise. Mion was in attendance, and he was saying emphatically :

"On my own responsibility, this very evening, I am going to write to Madame Fabre. She gave me definite instructions, and I have failed to carry them out because I trusted to you, Mion Labastide."

Denise wanted to tell him who she was, to explain her being there, that she might ask him for news of the patient, but the little old man was in the street before she had time to speak.

"What did he say?"

But Mion burst into sobs instead of answering.

When Denise went back into Jean's room, he was in bed, and old Marius was laying a place, for one only, on a table by the bedside. Then he lit the lamp and was going to draw the curtains.

"No, no," protested Jean, "leave the window open; I want air, night and day. They smother me, Denise dear, for fear I should catch cold. Marius and Mion are full of all the old-fashioned prejudices. To-morrow, Marius, you must haul down these huge heavy curtains and this great festooned canopy."

"Yes, Monsieur Jean; but they were your late

grandmother's curtains, they were."

"My late grandmother must forgive me. What would your father say, Denise, if he saw all these fine decorations that every law of hygiene condemns,—stifling curtains, carpets? Marius and Mion know nothing of hygiene, and that is why they are not afraid to nurse me. If I were to stay here long. I should alter a great many things. I had begun already."

"You will go on with it all later."

"With you, perhaps. Denise, come here. Give me your hand. I have frightened you. Well, I think I have been unduly despondent. The doctor seems satisfied. You have seen him?"

"No, only caught a glimpse of him."

"That is a pity; he would have reassured you. I am better. But he says my mother must come back from Germany, and I dare not tell him why I am putting off that event."

"What reason have you to put it off?"

"I long to have you with me, all to myself, for a few days."

"My darling, *I* would love it too; but the thing is impossible."

"Why?"

"My father would come for me."

"Oh! I should be pleased to see him. But—but you don't like the idea? Tell me frankly."

"No, I do not. I don't care to meet your relations, to play a part, to act a lie."

"Who talks of acting a lie? We would announce our engagement."

"No, not now. The journey I have taken, my being alone with you like this, my only too evident affection for you, would make my father very uneasy. You hardly understand my father's ideas of things."

"I thought he was very advanced in his ideas, very unconventional."

"In some ways, yes. But he has a very strong notion of his own authority as a father and of my obligation to confide in him,—in a word, of what is correct and proper. I prefer that he should be informed of our plans when you return to Monadouze, or when he comes here to fetch you. He will have met your mother and your step-father; they will have ceased to be strangers to one another."

"You would never think of all these people's scruples, if you loved me. But there, be it as you will! I am not strong enough to argue with you. And you are going—when?"

"Not to-night."

"To-morrow?"

"Don't think, please don't think about my going! and don't make me think of it!" she cried, a gush of genuine tears suddenly pouring from her eyes. "Cruel boy! I love you, and you are ill, and I shall have to leave you. It breaks my heart! Oh! Jean, Jean, as I am here, here to-day, let us forget to-morrow will ever come, forget your pain and my grief, and try to be happy. If only I could have brought you a little happiness!"

"Ah! that is how you must talk to me, beloved;

then I will agree to anything and everything, even to abject obedience to your father. Will you dine where you are? It is not very cheerful for you, but I cannot bear to lose one quarter of an hour of your company! And you will sleep in the room next mine. Look, there comes Marius bringing your dinner."

She tried to eat, but her throat was dry, and the sight of food seemed to turn her stomach. Jean sat up in bed, panting a little, striving for air and coolness. He refused to touch anything:

"Everything sickens me. Give me two or three grapes. I am so hot!"

"You are exciting yourself; you are quite feverish."

"I am always feverish."

Soon Marius carried away the dinner-tray.

The moonless sky, seen through the square of the window, darkened by imperceptible degrees. The day had left a faint, rosy glow behind it, that still mingled with the growing dusk of night. The first stars peeped out suddenly, sparkles of pale, pearly light. Then, as the heavens took on a deeper azure, they glittered like points of hoarfrost, some flashing with the red and green fire of precious stones. Night-moths fluttered in. Blindly, in odd, unexpected zigzags, they blundered against the red bed-hangings, the white shade of the lamp and even Denise's hair, though without disturbing her equanimity. None of the customary sounds of outdoor life were audible, neither footsteps nor voices; all the Sunday stir of the town was concentrated

elsewhere, in front of the cafés under the planes of the Place du Forum. This quiet corner of Arles between the Arènes and Notre Dame-la-Major was as lonely of an evening as the Alysamps. Faintly, at intervals, a gust of wind brought the far-away, feeble echo of music, so obscured by distance it was impossible to distinguish either instrument or tune.

Then, suddenly, without preface or prelude, Jean began to talk of his past life, of his earliest recollections. He recalled his childhood, his mother as a young wife, his father who had vanished so soon out of his life. His hands thrown loosely on the coverlet, a hectic flame burning in his cheeks, his eyes fixed and shining, he spoke eagerly, excitedly, in the sort of light-headed exaltation the first throes of asphyxiation provoke in advanced phthisis. A throng of memories, such as haunt the consciousness of the dying, rose at his summons, as if to constrain him to look back at whatever was sweet and fair in the past instead of forward at the abyss yawning before his feet, the abyss now so near at hand, which was swallowing up one by one the minutes of these last hours.

Denise, crouched by the bedside, listened to the dying boy's voice, which had already assumed an odd, unnatural quality, a little shrill, a little discordant,—a note that would ring for ever in her ears, as the look in Jean's eyes would linger for ever in her memory. He was talking now of Monadouze,—and over his face, like an eddy stirring the surface of a pool, passed the reflection of the

pictures he called up. His countenance glowed with an inner light like the transparent porcelain of a night-lamp, and in this irradiation of the soul shining through the flesh, all the ravages of disease disappeared. Denise was looking on,—with what feelings!—at this last supreme effort of life in a ruined body, this momentary resurrection of the young man, ardent, energetic, fascinating, who had been Jean Favières, and who to-morrow would be—nothing!

But indeed, as he lay there, with features worn to the most delicate refinement of moulding and outline, with his wonderful eyes, so velvety, moist and brilliant, with his dark hair clinging to the pale brow, with the spiritual awe and majesty about him of the mystery whose shadow he was even then entering, he was unforgettable.

“You are happy, Jean! Your eyes say so; but let me hear it from your own lips! You are happy?”

“Yes, very happy. I have no pain now. I feel as light as a flame. Spirit and body, I burn with a delicious glow. Oh! Denise, I owe you this hour, too! I owe you all my hours of happiness, I owe them all to you. Come nearer. There! give me your hands.”

“Here they are.”

“Now tell me; are *you* happy?”

“Yes, dear one.”

“You love me?”

“I love you.”

“You are mine?”

"I am yours."

"My wife?"

"Your wife."

"If I live, you will love me faithfully, I know. If I die, you will remember me."

"For ever."

"Come closer," and on her complying; "take the pins out of your hair, will you?"

She obeyed, wondering. The long plait was uncoiled, and lay, a serpent of tawny gold, on the purple damask. Jean took it in his hand reverently:

"Your beautiful hair, beloved! When I was delirious, I could think of nothing else; I could feel it over me like a net, like a wondrous, silken shroud! So long, so soft, so warm with your life, I seemed to hold it in great handfuls; I would part it to breathe and all the glorious mass stirred and trembled, and my senses reeled under the fragrance of it."

He closed his lids, dazzled by the voluptuous picture he had evoked; when he opened them again, Denise was standing up, slowly unwinding the long, thick coil. Tress by tress, wave by wave, the glorious wealth of hair broadened out, enveloping the girl's shoulders, back, loins, thighs, a regal mantle woven of all the splendours of silk and gold and copper, compounded of all the changing hues the autumn woods wear under the play of sunlight and shade.

The grey frock disappeared beneath this superb garment, while Denise's face seemed rejuvenated, looked almost like a young girl's.

Jean sighed out : " Oh ! Denise, Denise ! "

He dared not touch the virgin locks that no man had yet even looked on and held in full possession with eyes and hands. But with a divine smile she whispered :

" They are yours. "

Then he laid hold of them, almost roughly, by handfuls, covered his face with them, kissed them as once, in the woods of Saint-Dumine, he had kissed the veil torn from the girl's hat. She was surprised to see him turn suddenly pale.

" Enough ! " she said.

She tossed back her hair, and blushing shame-facedly, went to the glass over the chimney-piece to put it back in place. But Jean besought her :

" No ! stay as you are. "

" Mion will be coming. What would she think ? she would believe I was gone mad. "

" Mion has been a beautiful woman in her day. She has loved and been loved. Nay, let your hair float round you like a veil. No wedding veil will be finer for your brow, when I marry you. For I will marry you, Denise ! One night I shall bring you back here, into this room. "

He sank back on the pillow and turned away his head :

" Ah ! bind up your hair again. I cannot look at it. I cannot bear to think of a happiness, a bliss, that can never be. "

When it was done she resumed her seat without a word, and Jean was silent too.

Mion came in to say Denise's room was ready.

"It is the room on the right. There is a door communicates with this; Mademoiselle does not mind?"

"No."

"Mademoiselle can take away the lamp with her. Jean prefers the night-light."

Discreetly the old woman with the St. Anne face and the stately step moved to the window while Denise bade Jean good-night. She too had been young and beautiful and in love once, had Mior Labastide!

The valise lay open on the sofa in the unknown room where Denise was to sleep, so far away from Monadouze and Cayrol.

She had not a look to give to the furniture of the room, not a thought to bestow on her father and her home. All her old ties were broken. The moral crisis which had been growing more and more acute since the preceding winter, was reaching its paroxysm, and a sort of delirium creeping over the girl's brain.

It was not grief now, nor was it love, but rather a condition of fierce revolt against fate, a blank despair, tearless and uncomplaining, an unnatural longing to suffer and to die with Jean.

She undressed, walking up and down the room tossing her clothes down at random, shaking out her mane of hair, which once more fell loose about her shoulders. Every moment she crept to the door to listen if Jean was not calling her, just as she had listened that Good Friday night from her bed.

In the valise was a peignoir of white flannel

confined by a girdle at the waist. Denise slipped it on and lay down on the couch, where she lay stretched at her length, leaving the lamp burning, but shading her eyes with one arm.

She was thinking: "Jean is going to die! in a month he will be dead, and I shall be leaving him to-morrow; and I shall never see him again." A cry rose to her lips, but she shut them tight and kept it in: "Oh! I cannot bear it! I cannot bear it!"

Suddenly she sprang up, listening. Some one had pronounced her name! Was she dreaming, as at Royat? Was it a hallucination?

The house was all asleep, Mion, Marius, Jean; only the fountain plashed in the melancholy courtyard, between the orange and cypress. From far away came a faint sound of music—or was it fancy?

Was that a moan she heard in the next room? Barefooted, wrapped in her peignoir and her hair, Denise glues her ear to the door.

"Denise! oh! Denise!"

"Jean!"

She pushes the door ajar, peeps in and whispers:

"Jean! did you call me?"

"Denise! oh! Denise!"

She glides into the dimly-lit room, where the night-light was just flickering out, and with her outstretched hands gropes for the bed.

"Jean! what is the matter? It is I!"

"Denise! oh! Denise!"

She takes him to her breast like a child. He

starts and trembles as he feels her woman's bosom, her arms folded about him, her hair that sweeps down in a flood and hides both their faces. His heart bursting with desire, not knowing how Denise comes to be there or what he craves of her, he stammers sobbingly :

"I thought you were gone; I thought I should never see you again, that I was going to die alone. Oh! Denise! do not leave me! Denise, save me. You are my life! I live again when your body touches mine. . . I love you."

"And I love you!"

"My wife!"

"Jean! my poor darling, darling boy!"

They see nothing; they know nothing of the fond, foolish, mad things they do! Denise clasps Jean to her bosom, enfolds, hides him in herself, in her naked arms, beneath her hair, as if to defend him, with a movement that, spite of all, is chaste as a mother's caress. She pours out for him the heat of her blood, the warmth of her breath. Wildly, she kisses his cheeks and brow, his fevered face and streaming eyes. She puts her virgin body, as before she had set her soul, as a buckler between him and death!

He must weep no more, suffer no more! Let him be happy. Let him enter, dazzled, blinded with love, into the shades of everlasting night!

CHAPTER XXIV

“**Y**OU are going out?”

“Yes, father; I am going to the Châlet for Fortunade.”

Cayrol was standing at the open window of his study, his eyes fixed on Denise, who had just laid her hand on the latch of the low iron garden-gate. Her dress swept the stalks of the lilacs, which were almost leafless, and the tall tufts of the asters. The wind of an October evening was blowing, laden with the heavy fragrance of the musk and the acrid scent of the walnut-trees.

“You look pale, Denise,” he called to her.

“I want a walk. I am going to bring back Fortunade with me.”

“Capital! *She* is greatly changed too; she is always crying, day and night, Mère Brandou tells me. Her accident has left behind a serious nervous breakdown; we must distract her thoughts, poor girl!”

“Why do you say Fortunade is changed *too*? I am not altered. You are making yourself uneasy about nothing, father.”

Cayrol only gave a sigh.

“Since Fortunade has given up working by the

day, I am rather in a difficulty about my frocks," Denise went on. "The cold weather is coming, and this dress I have on is very, very shabby."

"Ah! I only wish you could care a bit more about such things, dear!"

"Why, what is the good?"

"I don't like your dressing in black. The material you chose at Tulle is not to my liking."

"You notice the colour of my gowns now? But what *does* it matter, father?"

She went out into the road, leaving her father still at the window.

Yes, Denise was greatly changed, almost as much as her little friend Fortunade Brandon, whose health, ever since the mysterious accident in the woods when she had fallen into the ditch, had given cause for anxiety. A moral shock so quickly unhinges the strongest of women! The Arles journey had upset Denise even more seriously perhaps than Jean's death.

"She is suffering," thought Cayrol; "and she seems to bear a grudge against me. Her mind, which was once so open and trustful, is a closed book to me. Yet I am very gentle with her; I have never once reproached her for going off so suddenly, a step I should most certainly not have sanctioned, had I been at Royat. True, we hardly ever speak of Jean, but she is always thinking of him and his death. And now, without exactly acknowledging it even to herself, she is resolved to wear a sort of mourning! Odious sentimentality! To think of Denise being romantic!

Poor lad, he will have done us a deal of harm, before all is over ! ”

Cayrol cherished no anger against the young man who had been laid to rest three weeks ago in the cemetery at Arles ; but he often said to himself : “ If only I had known ! How I should have begged my brother-in-law to send his ward to another doctor ! ”

Then he would recall, with a pensive, ironical smile, the letter Madame Fabre had written :

“ Jean died a painless death. We found him very weak, but calm and full of hope. The visit, only too short a one, of your dear daughter—we had no opportunity, alas ! of meeting her,—had had the best possible effect on the poor invalid’s state of mind. Though he spoke of arrangements to see to, and a will to make, he did not really think his end was so near. He fell asleep one evening, dreaming the happiest dreams.

“ I thank you, dear Dr. Cayrol, and I thank Mademoiselle Denise for all the devotion you have lavished on my son. He loved you both, with respect and I make bold to say, with enthusiasm. How fondly he looked back to his residence in your house, and how impatiently he expected the autumn ! A mother in tears prays God to bless you, dear Dr. Cayrol, dear Mademoiselle Denise, and to reward you with every happiness for the kindness you have shown our poor dead boy.”

Denise had been dry-eyed as she read the letter ; it had left her quite silent and cold. At last she had said :

"I expected it, father. When I bade him farewell at Arles I felt all was over, I felt he was dead for me from that moment."

Then she had gone up to her room and not come down again till the evening. Thus the first twenty days of autumn,—days of pouring rain and red stormy sunsets, dragged slowly by. Cayrol respected his daughter's silent, unassuming sorrow, which found no vent in tears or lamentations; but the feeling that it was always there irritated him almost to the verge of anger. What was there about this Jean Favières that Denise regretted him so bitterly, that she insisted on wearing mourning for him in her spirit, and even in her dress? What was it? The fleeting charm of a sick and suffering child, and nothing more,—no trace of the hardy virtues, of the thinking brain and energetic will which make a man really and truly a man.

"Can she have been in love with him? No, never! he must have been repugnant to her physically! What other sentiment could have moved her then, if not that of the pity 'which is akin to love,'—a sentiment he had always deemed so odious! But even that was going too far; she ought never to have yielded to it!"

And, in spite of himself, Cayrol was angry with Denise for bewailing Jean Favières when she was alone.

While her father was revolving these gloomy thoughts, Denise was marching along the high-road to Monadouze, turning her back to the setting sun, which was going down amid heavy, smoky clouds.

She went by the wood-sawyer, installed under the great elm, nodded to Mademoiselle Muret, the post mistress, who was weeding her little garden, and stepped into the inn for a moment to tell Maria Brandou of her errand.

"By all means bring back Fortunade with you, Mademoiselle, but don't keep her too late. The 'gaffer' will come for her with Madeleine about ten. Since her accident she has grown so fearsome, has Fortunade! You were at Royat when it happened. If you'd seen the state she was in when she came home—all torn and scratched, her face caked with mud and bruises all over her body! But terror had robbed her of speech, and she couldn't explain. A wicked practical joke—and a terrible fright it gave her! '*Boun Diou*,' said I; 'you shan't go out working by the day any more, *filhota*! Must find you another trade.' Then Monsieur Cayrol spoke for her to the gentleman who has built the chalet. It's not a bad place either; you've only to receive the folks, serve out refreshments and sell the picture postcards. Why, yes, when there's no tourists, on wet days, it's a bit lonesome down at the chalet, for sure. But she has her knitting, that's something for Fortunade."

"Or she can tell her beads."

"Tell her beads!" and Maria Brandou shook her little dark head in its tight, round net. "Dear lady, don't you know? that's all over and done with! She's given up being pious, Fortunade has. She misses Mass, yes, as if she did it on purpose. As for going to confession, not a bit of it! Since

August 15th Monsieur le Curé has been expecting her."

"But why?"

"Who knows? She's a queer customer, our Fortunade is!—and obstinate, oh, dear! and keeps her own counsel! All the same, she was too much given up to her pieties before; I'm not sorry she has dropped those notions. D'you remember, she wanted one time to turn nun?"

"She had the vocation."

"Nonsense; the Sisters had put it into her silly head, that was all! I'd no notion of giving a girl of mine and her dowry to a Convent. And the 'master,' he was downright angry. He was thinking of young Lionassou of the Bourg d'Eyrein. But that *mindrota*, that slip of a girl, she up and told the old man: 'Is it you or me's to be married? I don't like your Lionassou, and I won't have him!' Ah! children these days, they're a caution."

Then, as Denise was disappearing down the road, Maria Brandou called after her:

"Tell her we shall be keeping the *velhade* to-night, and will save some chestnuts for her!"

A wooden bridge thrown across the torrent, above the falls, joined the rocky promontory of Monadouze with the opposite cliff of the ravine. Below this bridge a terraced road followed the windings of the gorge. On reaching it, Denise could see on the other side of the abyss the road she had been treading just before and the blue-grey slates of her father's house. She was walking now with her face to the sunset, while the mighty roar of the

falls, rising from below, under her very feet almost, deafened her ears and set her quivering from head to foot like a crystal goblet. Through the chestnuts clothing the steep she could make out the foaming mass of the first cascade, the one that falls obliquely from a height of over a hundred feet, and plunges onto a pile of granite boulders in a cloud of spray spanned by a rainbow. A fence barred the way into the enclosed ground. Denise pushed open the little gate, which set a bell jangling, and began to descend the narrow path, which had been newly made, winding amongst shrubs and great detached boulders on the precipitous slope. It was always wet and slippery, this path, and littered with half-rotted leaves, affording a treacherous footing in spite of steps cut here and there in the rock. Ivy-bushes, junipers laden with dark blue berries and fern grew everywhere in profusion. The track zigzagged steeply down and led, half-way to the bottom, to the second fall, the *Redole*, a vast expanse of tumbling white foam. There, on a projecting rock like the prow of a ship, stood the miniature Swiss chalet, a new building with pointed gables and a little terrace running along the front protected by a guard-rail. At a lower level still, the third fall was visible, "The Horse's Tail," a long line of tumbling water, flashing in the light and plunging below into the gloomy depths of the *Inferno*,—an awe-inspiring sight that suggested to the imagination the tail of the "pale horse" of Revelations.

Denise, her ears dinning with the uproar and her hair wet with spray, reached the chalet at last.

On the terrace the little tables and iron garden-chairs stood ranged in perfect order, but the door of the house was shut and locked. Through one of the windows Mademoiselle Cayrol could look into the principal room, which was panelled with pitch-pine, and make out the shelves of "curiosities," the glass case of picture postcards, and on a table, in full view, a piece of knitting, with the long knitting-needles stuck in the blue worsted.

She called: "Fortunade, Fortunade"; but the roar of the falls drowned her voice. Leaning on the rail, she waited a few moments for her little friend to appear. No doubt the girl had gone upstairs to the rooms sometimes let to visitors; she would come directly, looking pale and suffering, but not so sad to Denise's eyes perhaps as in former days—for was *she* not sad too?

"My father is right," thought Denise; "Fortunade is greatly changed since Veydrenne went to prison, and I have changed too since—since the blow, must I call it? Alas! I dare not pity Jean now. The blow is for me, for me alone."

She did not tell herself: "I have committed a sin;" she felt no remorse. Mistress of her actions, responsible to herself alone, she had given herself, not for her own selfish pleasure, but to win one last, supreme delight for an unhappy being. No one in all the world had the right to reproach her for what she had done,—no one, not even her father; a woman of twenty-eight has outgrown the paternal jurisdiction.

And yet—why, after the sublime self-abandon-

ment at Arles, after the ecstasy of the completed sacrifice and the ineffable happiness bestowed so ungrudgingly, why was her conscience tormented by a vague uneasiness?

She thought of Jean's frenzied embraces, his mad exultation choked with sobs, his blissful slumber, as he lay wrapped in the golden hair of the woman he loved, buried as it were, in a winding-sheet of passionate ecstasy. But all these memories, at once fond and heart-breaking, were fading into a vague nightmare. At times, the past that was so near, the past she longed to keep for ever green, Denise felt it melting from her recollection, escaping her; losing its vivid reality, it lost all its force to stir her emotions. Then she would strive to revive it at the fount of memory, recalling point by point every detail of the journey, the arrival at Arles, the house, the room.

Alas! even Jean's face was beginning to grow faint and misty in her mind. She saw his face like the features in an old daguerreotype that show up distinctly in a particular light, but at other times are quite indistinguishable on the plate. "Is it possible—to forget like this what one has fondly loved, what one loves fondly still! What a bitter, shameful pang added to the pain of having lost the beloved object!"

When Mion Labastide sent her back the little packet of his letters, Denise went through another crisis of passionate regret and despair, but it was the last.

Meantime, a sentiment she would not acknow-

ledge to herself, a sentiment she would have pronounced absurd in any other woman, made itself insidiously felt,—the hereditary, the Christian sentiment of a certain physical degradation.

Perhaps she would not have experienced this feeling and the curious sense of discomfort and indifference that accompanied it, if she had given herself as a true woman, a true wife should, for love's sake and love's only, and not in the intoxication of self-sacrifice. Yes, perhaps!

The rapids that raced by in dark eddies between the two falls, the broad "*Redole*" and the long, narrow "Horse's Tail" flowed with so headlong a current that Denise's eyes could barely follow the course of the clots of foam and branches and leaves of trees that swept past between the pointed, jagged rocks rising from the bed of the torrent like rows of monstrous teeth. Taking a bunch of asters from her bosom, she tossed it in and watched the flowers caught and whirled away.

The seething white foam, the fierce rush and roar, the sense how possible, how easy a fall would be from the sort of overhanging balcony where she stood, suspended by itself half way down the face of the dizzy cliff, in the gloom of the gorge, made Denise shudder.

She threw back her head, and repeated her cry:
"Fortunade! Fortunade!"

Again the uproar drowned her call, and Denise turned back to the ch  let, re-examined the locked door, and looked in again at the room, all empty and orderly, and the ball of knitting lying on the table.

Fortunade has gone and she has forgotten to open the gate up above. She must have been at the mill or perhaps at Mère Lionardoune's, whilst she was talking to her mother; I shall meet her on my way home."

She scrambled up again, not without difficulty, over the road, and made her way to the Brandou's

"Fortunade is not at the chalet."

"Then she is at your house, Mademoiselle. She must have gone round by the mill. You'll find her at our place, for sure."

It was when Denise reached home neither her mother nor Françonnette had seen anything of the

After dinner, Cayrol settled himself in his arm-chair, his feet against the door of the stove, his pipe in his mouth, while Denise unfolded and spread on the table the black dress-material side by side with the paper pattern from the *Mode Pratique*. The lamp lit up as of yore the room with its grey-stained panelling, the gilt barometer, the stag's head and the yellow hair of the girl bending over her work; but the atmosphere was not the same, the old familiar, friendly feel was gone. Cayrol's good-humoured laugh was hushed; there were long silences of silence in the forced flow of conversation, sentences that were left unfinished or trailed off in half-exclamations, vague mutterings. The sharp clip of the scissors seemed to arrest all attempts at confidential talk.

At ten o'clock there came a knock at the out-

side door, and Françonnette went to open. It was old Brandou and his granddaughter, Madeleine, asking for Fortunade.

"She never came here at all. We supposed she had gone somewhere else, to see some ladies who had employed her before, at the Château, and had got back home too late."

The old man was evidently scared:

"But we're keeping the *velhade*—they're all waiting for her."

"Go round and see if she is at Mademoiselle Muret's, Père Brandou," suggested Cayrol.

"Why, what would she be doing at the post-mistress's?"

Madeleine, who hated trouble and anxiety of any sort, scolded her grandfather soundly in vigorous patois. Of course she was at the Château; she was always full of whims and fancies, was Fortunade. Madame la Baronne had kept her there for the night.

"All the same I should look in at the post-office," advised the doctor.

So the two set off again for the village.

Françonnette shook her head and opined that the Brandou girl was not at the end of her troubles yet.

"They do say, never have a pack of girls; why, if there's only one in the house, 'tis as bad as thirteen weasels. That Fortunade wench, for all her piety, is a bit over fond of gadding about o' nights. And that's not seemly, it isn't. '*Angelus sounada, filha retirada*'* my old mother used to

* "*Angelus* rings, good girls hie home."

But there's something not quite natural about this. They've put a spell on Fortunade, say ever since the Saint-Jean she's been as glum as abbas at the Crucifixion!"

ayrol questioned Denise: Was everything in order at the chalet? There was nothing leading to violence—a struggle—an accident?

No, nothing whatever."

Denise could see in her mind's eye the piece of stocking with the long knitting-needles, neatly wound in a blue ball and placed on the table.

Nothing out of the common, most certainly."

ayrol remarked:

If Veydrenne was at large, I might think he would come across Fortunade. But he has been in prison the last two months, and he is coming up for sentence next week."

Then he added thoughtfully:

That story of a fright and a fall has always struck me as odd. Once or twice I have asked myself if Veydrenne may not have assaulted the poor child. I never could bear to hear the fellow spoken of, I turned pale at the very mention of his name."

You have not questioned her, father?"

Yes, I tried; she never varied in her story."

Surely Veydrenne did not want to harm her. It had been good to him in his illness."

Who can say? I have always thought she was bound to denounce him."

Next morning the doctor went to the village, to the Brandou family terrified and bewildered. Fortunade had not been either to the Château or

the post-office. A lad from Touzac declared he had passed her on the road to the railway station.

"Can she have run away? But where to? And with whom? She had no lover."

"Can one ever be sure a girl hasn't a lover?" put in the doctor.

He set off on his round, questioning his patients as opportunity offered; but came back about two in the afternoon, ravenous with hunger, without any news of the missing girl.

He was just finishing his meal when the Curé Barbazan appeared.

"What can I do for you, Monsieur le Curé?"

"I must have a word with you, doctor."

"Come in. Take that armchair. You are ill, Monsieur le Curé?"

The Priest, a dark-haired, red-faced man, wearing a *soutane* too short for him, below which peeped his muddy shoes, was looking curiously at the glass cupboard of instruments, the bookshelves and the plaster bust of Auguste Comte on the chimney-piece bearing on a green plaque the motto: *Order and Progress*.

He asked:

"Whose portrait is that?"

"Auguste Comte's."

"A relation of yours?"

"No."

"Ah! a great doctor."

"Yes, if you put it so."

It was the first time Barbazan had set foot inside Cayrol's door.

The two men, at one time bitter enemies, had learned to respect and esteem each other by dint of sitting at the bedsides of the sick. Of peasant life, and peasants still, for all the cassock of the priest and the diplomas of the other, they shared a like passion for trees well pruned, fields well tilled and cattle well fed, and while remaining in theory irreconcilable foes, in practice they made common cause to relieve the wretched and right the victims of injustice. Both were consistent optimists, one for love of mankind, the other for love of God; they were fully persuaded that the sum total of good exceeded that of evil, albeit suffering and error were inseparable conditions of human existence. Their professional experience had shown them the ugly necessities both of mind and body to which men are liable. They had realised that we must not ask too much of anybody, and least of all of the poor peasant. Whether the grapes of Canaan nor the heroic virtues ripened in the ungrateful soil, within the narrow horizon, of Monadouze. It was a hard life and a hard climate,—and hearts were hard, but not all hearts! A gleam of generosity and good will, the prospect of a fine crop of young wheat, were enough to revive Cayrol's and Barbazan's faith in the rightness and beauty of things. Profoundly practical, always putting first of the duty immediately at hand, both armed with the same devotion this little corner of France, this little group of humble folks that looked to them for moral and material help.

No, I am not ill, doctor. I have come to speak to you about Fortunade Brandou."

"You know something?"

"And you?"

"No, Monsieur le Curé, nothing,—or next to nothing."

"Next to nothing?"

"I have my suspicions—I cannot say precisely of what. It is difficult to tell. An accident? an elopement?"

"An elopement, no!" declared the Priest, "an accident, perhaps. Then you know nothing? When Fortunade fell into a ditch coming back from Saint-Dumine they sent for you?"

"No. The child was only bruised, and in a highly feverish state. I went to see her on my own responsibility."

"What did she tell you?"

"Oh! a vague story: 'I thought I heard someone behind me; I was afraid, and started running. I fell into a ditch of brambles.'"

"Ah! And you have seen her again since?"

"Only seldom. My daughter was away, so the girl had left off coming to work by the day at our house."

"She had grown much thinner; she looked yellow; and her character, they say, was quite altered."

"She had always shown a tendency to hysteria."

The Curé murmured:

"I have always done what I could to check an exaggerated mysticism. But what troubles me most, doctor, is the moral revolution in the poor girl. For the Assumption, before the accident, mind you, she had been to confession. But since then she has

left off coming to church at all."

"Why?"

"Well, this is my idea,—I daresay nonsensical; but still it pesters me. The child has been plunged into despair. Her poor weak, woman's head has made shipwreck. . . Doctor, I cannot, I ought not to say more. I hoped *you* could throw some light on it all."

He rose to go:

"I will see the Brandous again, as I go by. The mother is obstinately hopeful. She is sending messengers to Tulle and Corrèze, and even to Eyrein. She kept repeating through her tears: 'If only she had gone off with young Lionassou!' At this moment they are dragging the pools and the narrows, below the falls."

"If I am wanted they must send for me. I won't leave the house. I will stay and wait for news."

So the day passed, a hot day for the last of the vintagers who were scattered almost everywhere among the purple vines, on the terraced side of the hills. Five o'clock had struck when Gineste, a day-labourer from Touzac, dashed like a madman into the Cayrols' garden, shouting:

"Monsieur le Docteur! Mademoiselle Denise!"

Cayrol and his daughter ran out.

"I have found Fortunade. I have not laid a finger on her, not I! Come, Monsieur le Docteur. There are men going down there already."

"Going down? Where?"

"Into the *Inferno*."

"Good God!"

In a moment Cayrol was out on the road, running, Denise and Françounette following far behind.

"Not that way! There's a footpath, Monsieur le Docteur, goes straight down the cliff."

The sun was setting. A golden haze that dazzled the sight filled the vast amphitheatre of the rocks, and Cayrol, holding his hand over his eyes, could just make out a long way off, on the far side of the gorge, a group of men moving about excitedly.

He heard voices from the village beginning to break out into lamentation. Then he saw women hurrying along the road. And suddenly a shepherd girl, standing on the pinnacle of a rock, pointed her distaff towards the abyss, and gave a woeful cry:

"*Ati! ati*,—there! there!"—and the women answered with a confused shout.

Then the doctor turned pale and his heart thumped heavily in his breast. He said to Gineste:

"Quick, quick! let us get on."

The man planted his feet firmly on the granite among the heather, and clinging to chestnuts, yews and oak saplings, began to climb slowly and cautiously down the precipitous slope, without a word spoken. Cayrol followed, slipping sometimes,—his weight and size made his descent difficult, but he was too much moved to think of the actual danger he was running. The slanting sunbeams forced him to turn his head away and half close his eyes.

The path descended in endless zigzags. As the two men proceeded, the cries and groans of the women sounded fainter and fainter from above their

heads and the mighty voice of the torrent drowned all other noises. The upper part of the gorge was still in light; but presently they plunged into the grey shadow, the cold, wet gloom of the "last circle" of the *Inferno*.

Now Cayrol and Gineste were at the bottom, and struck off to their right, following the bed of the torrent. Gineste broke silence:

"They've gone to fetch Monsieur le Maire and the Garde Champêtre and Monsieur le Curé, before telling the family"—adding, not without a touch of secret self-satisfaction:

"It was I saw her—she was caught between two rocks; that's why she was not carried to the bottom of the *gour*. If she had been, she'd have come up again in a week's time, like the rest of them. She was stark naked,—and her eyes—oh! her eyes!"

He let go of a yew to grasp lower down a bough of ivy:

"Stark naked, yes! It's always like that. People who tumble into the falls, the strong current rolls them over the rocks, and that strips them bare."

He stopped to take breath, then added:

"I never saw anything so *cheitiu*, so small and pitiful, as the poor lass."

"Get on! get on!" ordered Cayrol.

But Gineste had caught sight of the group of helpers and the "authorities," the Maire and the Garde Champêtre, who had come down by another way; there were five or six altogether, clustered round a great flat rock.

"Hé! here comes Monsieur Cayrol!"

"There is nothing he can do," said Jouaillac, the maire, who was whiter than his own shirt collar. "The poor girl needs nobody but the grave digger."

The Garde Champêtre added importantly :

"We must ascertain details. That's the law and, whatever we do, mustn't touch the body."

"Details? what details?" growled old Beneyton, who had come down along with Chadebech, before anyone else. "She fell from up yonder. She's not the first has slipped on that confounded devil's rackway."

"H'sh ! h'sh !" exclaimed Jouaillac, who did not care about hearing the devil's name mentioned in presence of a dead body. "Can one ever tell?"

"She didn't throw herself over, anyway. Why should she have made away with herself?"

Cayrol came up, and all drew back a little and fell silent, as if the doctor, by some mysterious means, was going to clear up the secret of the girl's death right off.

Now he could see the corpse ; it lay where the current had thrown it, on the flat surface of a boulder, one leg hanging down, caught and jammed between two rocks. The head was thrown back, and the dark hair, half hiding the face, dipped in the clear, black water. The long, beautiful locks mingled with the trailing water-weeds at the bottom and waved lightly to and fro as the current swept by.

In the grey gloom of the abyss the pale form looked very small and fragile, like a little child's. The belly was swollen and marked with livid

blotches, whether bruises or tokens of incipient decomposition. The arms, thrown back behind the head, were dislocated like the arms of a broken marionette, and there was nothing to hide the bosoms with their nipples and the brown circles round them and the silky armpits; all the mystery of a woman's shape lay brutally exposed.

But in face of the dead girl, the men of Monadouze had no ugly thoughts. The Maire was thinking of the inquiry that must needs be held and the inconvenience the whole affair would entail on him. Gineste was thinking of the girl's mother, Mère Brandou; Chadebech and Chastre were asking themselves how the accident happened? Or was it an accident?

Cayrol, recovering his professional coolness, gently parted the dripping hair, till the waxen face could be seen, the features a little puffed, the lips drawn back from the gums, the lids showing between them a horrid line of white.

His strong, sensitive hands raised the head, but it fell back again helplessly, for the neck was dislocated. Then they felt the broken limbs, without a tremble, heedless of the clammy, repulsive chill of the dead body.

"We must get her up quickly, before dark. I will make my examination afterwards,—at her home."

And instantly the words "at her home" called up the house in the village, the mother, the sister, the old grandfather. Cayrol realised that this dead thing was Fortunade Brandou, the little dark girl, so full of pride and high aspirations, whom Denise

and he had loved, whom they had seen moving about among them day after day. Fortunade, *that* was Fortunade !

The father took the place of the doctor ; Cayrol thought of Denise, and he felt a desperate longing to see his daughter again, to press her, warm and alive, to his heart. With burning eyes and a dry throat, he said to Gineste :

“ We must not take her like that ; lend your blouse.”

He wrapped Fortunade in the coarse blue stuff, loath that the poor child's body should come naked into the men's hands to meet the curious eyes that would scrutinize it presently. With difficulty he released the leg that was imprisoned as in a vice between the rocks, and took up the body in his arms. With Gineste's help, the rest going on in front or following behind, he reclinced the dark windings of the path, the successive circles of the *Inferno*.

As they mounted higher and higher up the wall of the ravine, a warmer light surrounded them, filtering through the trees, gilding the brown heather while the roar of the torrent grew fainter below them and sounds of lamentation, still inarticulate and broken by sobs, became audible from above.

They reached the road at last, to find the whole population of the village assembled,—except the girl's mother, who had been kept from coming by the Curé. A hand-litter had been brought to the spot.

For a moment all fell silent at sight of death in

their midst. Cayrol and Gineste laid the body on the bier, and put back the hair in place. The covering they had thrown over her was too short to hide the feet and the lower part of the legs, and the arms were still extended behind the head; they were so stiffened it would have been impossible, without breaking the bones, to straighten them out.

Two men lifted the litter, and as they stepped off, the groans of the women broke out again in mournful, heart-rending tones, interspersed with pious ejaculations:

"Paubra ! paubra !"

"Paubra mère !"

*"Santa Vierdza !"**

Denise saw the sad procession coming. She was standing by the gate of the cemetery, in front of the chapel, in which, according to custom, the body was to be placed. Round her pressed a throng of women, —Mademoiselle Muret, Mère Buneil, Madame Lionardoune with her distaff and her great hat.

A workman, close by, was sawing up logs. He had seen nothing yet, and was not going to waste his time idling and waiting about. The monotonous siss-siss of the saw seemed to tear at Denise's heart-strings.

She wanted to see, yet she feared the sight. The great walnut-tree in the corner of the graveyard shut out her view of the valley.

Its gnarled boughs were black and the leaves a reddish brown against the intense scarlet of the western sky and the ashen grey of the rest of the

* * Poor girl ! poor girl ! Poor mother !—Holy Virgin ! "

horizon. Denise's eyes were dry, fascinated by the gloomy fantastic aspect of the old tree and the red of the autumn sunset.

How red the sky was to-night; red behind the long wisps of stormy cloud and the rising mists, red as blood, red as wine in the vat, red as conflagration and battle!

It was a sight awful in its magnificence, a purple portent of the sky, a mighty procession marching across the heavens, with blazing torches and prancing horses and tattered flags, as for the obsequies of a warrior hero dead!

The bearers halted before the chapel and the Sacristan opened the doors, showing the lowly altar within, tawdry with its painted statues and gilt porcelain vases.

The dead girl's hair had fallen loose again and trailed in the dust, and leaves and little spiky chestnuts were caught and entangled in the dark meshes. The water dripped from the soddened mass, and soon formed a trickle on the ground that crept to Denise's feet.

Pushing past the crowd of women, she stood close to the bier. Then she fell to her knees and kissed the dead girl's brow.

In a flash of memory, she recalled Fortunade's troubled look as she said: "No, I cannot go alone to Le Chastang; I am afraid!" Then came the accident in August, never accounted for, and the girl's breakdown in health afterwards. Once more she saw the ball of knitting on the table of the chalet, with the long, glittering needles, the terrace,

the guard-rail, the flowers swept away by the dark current. She half guessed the tragedy, that had culminated perhaps only a few moments before she came, and her whole body shook with a deep-drawn sob.

Yes, a few minutes sooner and she might have saved Fortunade; she would have read in the child's eyes her dreadful purpose; she would have drawn from her the secret, too heavy for her to bear, heavy as a mill-stone about her neck, that had dragged her down into the leaping foam and the whirlpool of the raging torrent.

And now she was dead! dead—not for a moment's lapse from virtue, not for a disappointed love: Fortunade, in her virgin purity, had never loved any but God, only God and the poor! dead for having gone out to help the man all other men loathed, dead for having dared the insane attempt to save a lost soul! Lost and undone herself, no doubt brutally outraged, twice over a victim, she had paid with her maidenhood and her life the price of her sublime unselfishness of pity!

What she must have suffered, good, Christian soul that she was, to come to despair of her salvation and of God's forgiveness, to hurl herself to death without confession, her soul weighed down with what she believed a mortal sin! And of these agonies of conscience, this madness of desperation growing more desperate day by day for weeks and months, no one, neither mother nor sister, nor even Cayrol, would ever know anything!

No one had ever understood Fortunade, no one

had suspected her true nature, her great loving heart, too great for human love. She had gone to and fro, to all seeming like the other girls of Monadouze, ignorant and uncouth, busied with common tasks, amid the common herd. Soon she would be forgotten, and her bones would go to feed the rank grass and the roots of the old walnut-tree. And only Denise would ever know how pure a flame had been quenched for ever!

Cayrol touched his daughter's shoulder:

"Get up, Denise!" he said; "and go home. I wish you to. Here is the Curé coming with——" and now, close at hand, could be heard the mother's cries.

CHAPTER XXV

LATER in the evening Cayrol came home, to find Denise seated beside the stove, a handkerchief thrown over her eyes and with her back to the light.

She asked :

“ Well, father, and poor Maria Brandou ? ”

“ She was terribly, terribly upset ; but she is getting quieter now by degrees. There are a number of women there, and everybody insists on sitting up with her. The Curé has been, and he behaved admirably. He would admit of no possibility but an accident, or a sudden aberration of intellect. And he said the prayers. Fortunade will be buried, the day after to-morrow, in consecrated ground. Mère Brandou, proud and overbearing as she is, could never have endured the scandal of a funeral without the rites of the church ; she would have left the district first.”

“ I will go and sit up with her.”

“ No, my girl, no ! I have told her you would wish to, but that I should not allow it. You have had far too much stress and strain as it is for some while past. Stay at home, Denise. To-morrow you shall go and see poor Fortunade again and take

her some flowers. The women have dressed her in white, and she wears her communion wreath on her head."

"Father, I loved her dearly ; my place——"

"Your place is here, with me. Do I count for nothing now in your life, I, who am alive?"

He sat down beside Denise and threw his arms round her :

"Darling Nise ! my little Nise ! Think of your health, child, I beseech you ; take care of yourself ! There are so many perils all about us,—disease, death, a hundred risks."

Denise kissed him :

"I am strong, father ; no danger threatens me. I am only sorrowful—very, very sorrowful. These two deaths, one so soon after the other ! Two young lives."

"One was doomed, darling. The other,—ah ! what of the other ? If they knew the truth, Denise, they would be less grieved for Fortunade. She was *afraid* to live ; she was wrong, it is a *duty*, our first duty, to live ; time makes everything right in the end. But, given her character, I can understand her doing what she did."

"You think——"

"And you——"

"Yes," whispered Denise, "I have thought of that. She had a secret, she had been abominably disappointed in someone. That man——"

"Veydrenne ?"

"She did not love him, I am sure of that ! She was trying to reform him, but she was afraid of him.

What happened? I cannot tell. Fortunade never confided in me."

"Never?"

"No, never. Her soul was closed against everyone, and barely half open to me. Have her parents no suspicions?"

"No. They believe it an accident. I have not tried to undeceive them. But——"

The doctor threw up his hands and shook his head.

"You, father, you suppose——"

Cayrol hesitated. In the kitchen Françounette could be heard in lamentation, her old voice quavering out fitfully in the silent house:

"Paubra ! paubra filhota ! Te perdouno, lou Salvadour ! Per te, aquei fini ! Meritas pas de mourir, Fortunadouno !" *

Cayrol dropped his voice, to say:

"I examined the body, when I was alone, before giving the burial certificate. No trace of violence. There has been no crime—but, but—dare I tell you the truth, Denise? It will be a fresh grief for you. I have not told a soul, not even the Curé. I observed the first signs of pregnancy."

Denise broke into a cry:

"Father, you are mistaken. Fortunade, never!"

"No, I have made no mistake! She has been enceinte for two months or thereabouts, which would explain the nature of that accident that nobody could make out; the poor girl must have

* "Poor, poor girl! The Saviour forgive you. For you all is over. You did not deserve to die, Fortunade!"

been assaulted and violated by a villain. When she understood her condition, what with her temperament, the violent prejudices of these rustics, and the terror she felt of her friends' anger, she thought herself ruined, disgraced, and lost her head completely. I cannot condone what she did, of course, but I can understand it. Her parents, who bewail her now, would have beaten her and turned her out of doors. She could not trust them, she could not ask their help. Oh! if only she had told me! I would have defended her against her family, poor child! I feel such infinite pity for the woman who becomes a mother, forsaken by her friends, abandoned to her grief and loneliness! Such a one is twice sacred in my eyes. And you, you too, Denise, would have defended Fortunade!" But Denise had fallen against her father's shoulder in a dead faint.

When she recovered consciousness, she found herself in the doctor's study, where Cayrol and Françonnette had laid her on the sofa, with her head low; her dress was unfastened, and a strong smell of vinegar was in her nostrils.

"There, it's over now," said Cayrol tenderly. "The shock was too much for you, my poor darling, your strength is quite exhausted. No, don't speak. As soon as you can walk you must lean on me and get up to your room."

"I can walk now," and she got up, tottering. Françonnette brought a candle to light her up the stairs, and Denise was soon undressed and in her bed.

"No more sad thoughts now! You must get to

sleep, darling ! ”

Cayrol kissed his daughter's hair very tenderly, but she drew back nervously from his caress and closed her eyes.

“ Good-night, Nise. I am going to bed too ; I am dead tired. ”

“ Good-night, father. ”

“ You feel better ? ”

“ Yes, much better. Don't be anxious. ” When he had left the room, Denise lay quite still, stretched on her back, her arms by her sides, pale and rigid. Her tears had stopped, she had forgotten Fortunade. A thought she would not, she dared not harbour, brooded like a dark bird of ill omen about her pillow, hovering and wheeling persistently about her head and filling her brain with terror. No, no, she refused to entertain it, this dreadful thought, this horrid incubus that threatened to possess her mind, and grow a living, devouring monster, to gnaw, gnaw at her soul, and never leave her.

But the thought would not be driven off, its haunting presence pressed closer and closer, till suddenly, taking shape in words, it became a lurid picture that seized and held the reluctant imagination.

Denise sprang out of bed, her eyes dilated, her skin cold and clammy, at the icy breath of mortal fear. Her teeth chattered ; her hands shook so violently she all but dropped the copper candlestick. She slipped her feet into her slippers, threw a shawl over her thin nightgown, and made her way downstairs,

Not a sound reached Cayrol or Françonnette.

Entering her father's study, Denise put down the candle on the table and proceeded to search for a book on the shelves.

Having found the volume, she began reading with feverish haste, only half understanding the anatomical descriptions and the engraved diagrams which were like nothing she had conceived possible, she thought, and filled her with wonder and a shrinking disgust.

All the grim drama of a woman's life was unrolled before her eyes, all the mystery of motherhood. Years ago Cayrol had explained the gist of the matter to her, speaking circumspectly, reverently, not without admiration for the wonderful handiwork of nature ; but now, revealed crudely in its details, the whole thing seemed the wanton caprice of a cruel, bloody-minded God, a refined, useless torture, lingering and atrocious as the torments of a Chinese prison.

Putting back the volume, Denise picked up the light, went up again to her room, and to bed again. She drew the bed-clothes over her head, as if to bury herself in the dark. She kept her hands away from her body, afraid to touch it, so changed, so unfamiliar did it seem to her, a hostile something to be feared and hated.

Happy Fortunade who was lying there, her secret dead within her, her brow crowned with innocent roses ! happy Fortunade who would never wake more !

CHAPTER XXVI

FORTUNADE'S funeral, the despair of the Brandou family, the excitement in the village, Denise saw it all as if in a dream. That generous heart, that soul so compassionate towards all in affliction, had not a thought to give to others.

What could others do to help her? Callous to-day, hostile to-morrow, they found no place in her mind. Yes, she was alone, utterly alone, her only hope that blind chance might save her. Her mind turns inward and sets itself to scrutinize anxiously the most trivial irregularities of health, while by a curious doubling of consciousness her body appears to Denise to be no longer herself, but a companion inseparable from herself, a companion who has betrayed her, whom she hates, but over whom she has lost all power of control.

There was a time once when she never thought of it at all. Unconsciously she had experienced the joy of perfect physical well-being, as beautiful children do in their still unspoiled innocence, and like them, she had hardly known she had a body, which gave her neither pain nor pleasure nor desire. She hardly knew her own shape even, making the strict

hygiene of her father's training compatible with a nunlike modesty. Hence it was doubly odious, doubly shocking to her, this unceasing watch she felt bound to keep on her own material organism, blindly obedient to the fatal laws of sex, which receives and develops the germs of life as the seed-field receives the seed, passively.

Sometimes her curiosity would break all bounds and conquer her shamefacedness,—to her tearful sorrow afterwards; then she would gaze long and critically at the firm, white, wholesome flesh and shapely body, which still retained its maiden slimness and would not give up its secret till after such and such a number of days. Anxiously she noted every little pain and trifling derangement and fancied ailment; then, finding these meant nothing, she would be horrified to feel others, more real this time, in which she persistently refused to see anything but mere effects of nervous strain, the nervous reaction after the mental shocks of the last few months.

She kept the book she had taken from the doctor's library hidden in her room, and every night searched its pages eagerly. Her repugnance disappeared before the imperative desire *to know for certain*. But there was a good deal she could not understand.

Physiologically a woman, and perhaps a mother, she was still a girl morally and mentally. The night at Arles had passed as swiftly as a fevered dream, without leaving any precise recollection behind. Vaguely she recalled a series of vague

sensations, blunted by a sort of physical anæsthesia. Neither pleasure nor pain,—a haze of undefined emotions. Nothing more chaste than her act of unstinted self-sacrifice, and Denise could *not* bring herself as yet to associate that act and her picture of Jean with the possible consequences, nor did the thought of maternity awake in her any touch of the maternal instinct. Her thoughts would *not* dwell on the child that might be born, and whose existence was still only guess-work. She could only brood over the horrors of suspense and the dreary waiting from day to day. She *would* not think of anything beyond.

Every morning when she woke she would tell herself:

“I shall know it is all right to-day. No, it *cannot* be as I fear. If I had lived with a husband, yes, I might have had a child, but as things were!—I must be deceiving myself; I am full of ridiculous fancies!”

She went about her daily occupations in the house with an activity that surprised Françounette and Cayrol. Work did not tire her; food caused her no qualms. She was the same as she had always been. An occasional giddiness, slight perspirations at the temples and in the palms of the hands, sudden fits of sleepiness,—and that was all.

“That proves nothing. Everybody has had giddy fits and sweats and somnolences.”

So the morning would go by. But, of afternoons, when Denise sat down to read or sew, or strolled out in the garden by herself, the old terror would

suddenly grip her; her cheeks would blanch, her knees bend under her and her breath come short. Yes, surely here were the symptoms described in the book! Then she would mount to her room, shoot the bolt and hunt through the medical descriptions and the anatomical plates in search of reasons for hope or despair. She would undress hurriedly and fall to studying her own body. At other times she would throw herself on her bed and lying in the dusk of the drawn curtains with hot, tearless eyes, falter: "Oh! God! oh! God!" overwhelmed by the presentiment of an incomprehensible, undeserved shame swooping down on her. What could she do? what succour could she hope for? Hour by hour the catastrophe came nearer. Do what she would, Cayrol would know; and this thought, that her father would know, was so unbearable, so horrible, that she would tear at her pillow with teeth and nails to stifle her cries. No! he must never, never know!

She could die? But Fortunade was dead, and Cayrol had known all the same.

A time came when doubt was no longer possible. Her waist grew larger, her bosoms swelled like ripe fruits, a bluish tinge darkened her eyelids. Her hair lost its gloss and glitter under the brush. Her skin changed in hue and texture. Two processes seemed to be at work in her,—a blossoming out and simultaneously a subtle, delicate fading and deflorescence.

Her temperament altered too, grew more unstable, more timid. She had sudden outbreaks of anger,

hysterical floods of tears, and sullen lethargies.

She spent long periods at the cemetery, kneeling in the grass beside Fortunade's grave, on which the chrysanthemums were withering.

The tree of the dead, the old walnut, was leafless now and its boughs, like the contorted lead-work of a painted window, framed purple, blue, red patches of the wintry landscape. Under the iron sky birds of passage flew by, making black triangles against the clouds, triangles that presently broke up into long, swaying lines like a kite's tail, while the north wind swept away their wild cries.

Denise sprang up instinctively, quivering with the same longing that animated the strong wings and straining necks of the migrants. To be gone,—to fly away towards the light, to unknown lands and new faces, to begin life afresh!

But round about her the rain-drenched hills raised their walls, and before her feet lay the precipitous gorge. The horizon was shut against her, like the future. Her very feet seemed riveted to the earth, held by the magnetic power of the dead who were drawing her to them. Dropping again to her knees, she could hear Fortunade and Jean calling to her from beneath the ground.

But so strong in her was the instinct to live that it silenced their voices. She tore up her feet from this churchyard mould in which they seemed already sunk, and her eyes averted from the abyss, she would fly back to the house for refuge. Then Fortunade would come and sit facing her in the deep embrasure of the window; and at night Denise

would hear Jean sighing on the other side of the wall.

December,—and the *velhades* began at the Brandous', while the lads tramped from village to village to ring the *Avenamen*. The same as last year, Denise still sat working by the stove in the dining-room of evenings, watching the muslin curtains over the windows darken as the early dusk fell and the lamp was lighted.

She had come to no decision. An overmastering lassitude of mind and body kept her inactive, waiting passively; she suffered much less now, her powers of suffering being exhausted for the time being.

Then, about mid-December, when her approaching motherhood was no longer a theoretical certainty but a tangible reality, and her shape altered and she could feel the child stirring within her, she awoke as from among the dead and knew herself again, wondering to have recovered her old spirit, her old straightforward, unflinching, patient courage. She abandoned all hope of succour from some accident of Nature. The sense of her responsibility, the resolve to do her duty, gave her back the strength to meet the coming trials.

She began to think no longer of herself, or even of her father, but of the child. She began to picture her babe in her imagination; she lent it a bodily shape and a living soul. Motherly love, ripening in her heart ever since she had reached womanhood, suddenly grew to a head, swallowed up pain in its refulgence and consumed selfishness away in its

fervent heat.

A mother! And at the word the tell-tale shape which she had looked at with fear and loathing and disgust, she now touched as if it were a holy thing. She could not deem it less pure than of old, her body that had known naught of love save the physical sacrifice, and which was soon to feel the pangs of childbirth. She forgot the night at Arles; she forgot Jean. It seemed to her that her maidenhood was by miracle blossoming into motherhood. Had it not been for the grief and pain that her father was bound to suffer she would have felt happy, in spite of everything.

But there was Cayrol! And when Denise thought of him, she became once more the broken-spirited, woe-begone, craven creature she had been at first.

He was no stage father. He would not treat his daughter, cowering at his feet, to long harangues about the honour of their name; he would not turn her from his doors with a tragic wave of the hand, her and her bastard! Deeply attached as he was to old traditions and family ties, Cayrol was full of pity for every woman, and above all, every mother,

He had said many a time he was used to salute all women with child, as the old Romans of the Republic did, without ever asking if the *brat* was lawfully begotten or no. All ribaldry about such things angered him, as a piece of foolishness, and cowardly foolishness. To his taste the fairest work of art was not so fair a sight as a young mother suckling a new-born babe.

The man who was ever gentle to poor peasant

wenches who had been betrayed, who made interest with the parents to win their forgiveness for the daughter who had been seduced and forsaken, who a score of times had paid out of his own purse for the humble layette of a fatherless brat, who had championed and shielded Fortunade, he would never turn against his own child; he would shield and save *her* too!

But at the cost of what agonies of mind, with what dire shipwreck of his pride as a father, his trust, his love!

"I must speak to him! I must!" thought Denise when she was alone. "The day will come whether or no, when he will discover all. If I go to him, humbly, contritely, he will suffer all the same, but he will be better disposed to forgiveness."

But when she found herself face to face with Cayrol, in the evening, after dinner, when they always sat together and everything seemed favourable to outspoken confidences, when she looked into her father's candid eyes and saw his grey hair shading the furrowed brow, his thick-lipped, good-natured mouth under the truculent moustache, she was struck dumb. "I cannot! Oh! I cannot do it. I would rather die!"

Nevertheless, she did speak one evening.

In the doctor's study with the green wall-paper a fire of logs and brushwood was blazing. Cayrol had been skimming through a medical review, but of a sudden he lifted his eyes and fixed them on Denise.

She was sitting, wrapped in a loose peignoir,

elbows on knees and head in hands, gazing into the flames which threw a dancing mantle of light and shade all about her.

"What are you thinking about, dear?"

"Oh! nothing."

"That is not true; you are full of sad thoughts, I can see that plainly. Ah! Denise, will you never be comforted?"

Then he added in a softer voice:

"I know your secret, my poor child. This is the first time I have referred to it; I have respected your grief. Those we have loved and lost, we weep for them, we cherish their memory, and we do well; but we have our duty to the living. The dead are dead, Denise; do not keep your eye for ever riveted on their graves. Think, your life is before you; it may yet be sweet and prosperous, if you keep a good heart. Make up your mind to be happy. I will do what I can to help you. It is not impossible——"

"It is impossible."

"How despairingly you say that!"

"Father! you think you know—you think——"

She bowed her head, looking so broken, so grief-stricken, that Cayrol felt a cold breath of fear blow over them, the fear of approaching calamity. This secret of Denise's, which he had thought to fathom, terrified him. He stood a moment weak and trembling. He dreaded the words she was going to speak,—words that might, perhaps, change their hearts, their love for one another, their whole future, the very foundations of their old life together.

But he quickly recovered himself. He took his daughter's hands, drew her forcibly to him, and in a grave tone :

"Denise, you must speak out. You must say, without hesitation, without prevarication or concealment, what you have to say. I cannot guess what it is."

She broke into a sob :

"It is too cruel for me—for you. Father, oh ! father !"

"Your father, yes, and your friend, and your protector. What have you to fear from him ? If you had done something wicked, he would judge you less hardly than you do yourself. Be brave ; let us both be brave !"

Like lightning across a dark sky, the presentiment of evil flashed by once more ; calamity showed close upon them ! Cayrol whispered :

"Jean Favières,—*he* is at the bottom of it ?"

"Yes."

"I thought as much. You have done something very foolish, eh ? You have written letters to the young man. They have been found. You are torn with anxiety ?"

In his innocence he never dreamed of anything worse than some childish scrape of the sort, about compromising letters. But Denise assured him :

"No, no. All my letters have been returned."

"By him ?"

"By his old servant ; he had left directions."

"She sent them to you after ?"

"Yes, after."

"And nobody knew about your—your affection for one another?"

"No one."

"Then what is it you fear?"

"Everything."

"Everything? What do you mean? Speak out, I say; tell me!"

She was standing, and he held her prisoner by the wrists, gripping them with a force he had no conception of in his agitation. His anger was rising. Underneath the physician, underneath the philosopher, the peasant was awakening, imgrained with the world-old dogma of a father's authority over his children.

"Tell me, I say!"

"Not as you are——"

"You are afraid of me?"

"Yes."

"Denise!"

He let go the bruised wrists, and Denise, most of whose weight had rested on him, dropped to her knees on the floor, whence she made no effort to rise. Cayrol was ashamed of his loss of self-control, and his anger vanished at sight of his daughter cowering thus at his feet, pale and ill and unhappy.

He stepped back towards the table, and kicked the armchair roughly out of his way. This little display of violence relieved his feelings, and he turned back to Denise.

"Come, come; don't let us lose our heads, either of us! Most likely we are exaggerating the seriousness of the case. Come, my little Denise, there,

there! Let us resume the friendly talk my ill-temper interrupted."

He resumed his seat, inviting her to do the same, but she never stirred.

"You would rather stay as you are, like a poor culprit come to confession? Well then, dear, lay your head against my shoulder, and whisper low in my ear. You loved Jean?"

"He loved me."

"But you, you yourself?"

"I thought——"

"You thought you loved him? you pitied him?"

"Yes."

"And he wanted you to love him?"

"Yes."

"Ah! I was right then! Why were you not more open with me?"

She could only stammer :

"You would have sent him away sooner, you would have made him understand that—that we could never——"

"That you could never marry him? Yes, I should have made him understand that. He would have been hurt, but he would have consoled himself after a bit."

"No."

"How do you know?"

"He loved me too deeply."

"Or you loved him too well?"

"Perhaps."

"But why? What was there about Jean Favières?"

"He was so unhappy!"

"He was not worthy of you. No, no, you will never make me believe that."

"Father, he is dead."

"True, death does away with all grievances, annuls all responsibilities. I should be a fool to bear a grudge against a dead man. But the dead man's deeds live after him, Denise! The injury he has done you remains. Ah! how near he has come to breaking your heart, my poor girl!"

"He meant no harm. It made him so happy to hope, he trusted my promise so fondly! He was so kind and good. Do not blame him. The wrong I have done you was all mine; I am responsible."

"In one word, what was there between you? You speak of a 'promise.'"

Then, huddled between her father's knees, her face pressed against his broad chest where the heart beat strongly, she confessed the secret betrothal.

"So you loved him?"

"I did not love him in that way. I found myself drawn on little by little by force of circumstances. All the time I knew the engagement meant nothing, that Jean could never marry me. I pitied him so, that was all, and gave him a fond hope to comfort him."

"You were deceiving him, as you were me."

"Oh! father!"

"He knew quite well I should never give my consent. He was aware of my views about marriage. So he was deliberately playing the blackguard."

To condone Denise's fault, he was putting all the blame on Jean.

"Don't speak so harshly! You are unfair to him. He wished to ask your leave in the first place, but I persuaded him to wait. And you said yourself he would get well. You, too, were deceiving him with false hopes, out of kindness of heart. Father, you said—the dead are dead. Then don't let us bring Jean into the discussion at all. I am the only, the sole and only one to blame."

"You told me lies, for months! How could you? And I trusted you, I loved you. You looked at me with your candid eyes; you did not blush when I sat between you and Favières. But all the time I was losing my hold on you; and now I have lost you altogether. I feel I have. Your heart is changed."

His anger flamed up again.

"What occurred when you saw him again, when you went to Provence? Give me an answer! you torture me by your silence; you make me think absurd, impossible things. Don't let me think them. Speak out!"

Then, suddenly recovering his calm:

"Speak, Denise! Whatever you have to tell me, it will be less hard to bear than this suspense. I will be good to you, I will be gentle with you. Take pity on me; give me a word of comfort! I have always loved you; I am loath to offend you even in my thoughts. Speak, my darling!"

"Father! I am bound to pain you horribly,—and I cannot do it. My punishment is more than I can

bear. Any other penalty I am ready to endure, but not that, not your grief. Father! oh! father!"

"My little girl! my child! What have you done?"

"I am very unhappy. There is not a more miserable woman in the world. I am worn out, I am dying! Do not be cruel to me. Father! father! save me!"

She uttered this cry for help in a tone that stirred Cayrol to the depths of his being.

"I *will* save you, my darling. But what from? What is it you fear? What is the danger?"

"You would have forgiven Fortunade, if she had been your daughter. You said so. Well——"

He understood.

"You! you—you are——"

He did not curse her, he did not cast her from him; but his face grew so white his grey hair, his grizzled moustache looked dark against the startling pallor. His flesh turned cold, his sight grew confused, the lamp seemed to dance before his eyes and the ground to sink beneath his feet. In the silence a great wave of grief is rolling in to overwhelm him. Cayrol feels it coming, this incredible, this impossible sorrow, with a half hope he can escape it yet. It is a bad dream; he will awake in a moment.

But the moment does not come, and the sorrow sweeps over his head.

Who is this woman, prostrate at his feet, clinging to his knees, crying words he cannot understand, crushing his heart under an intolerable weight?

Her face is convulsed, her form swollen and misshapen beneath the loose-fitting black gown; she is like Denise,—grown old, stricken with illness. Yet she is not Denise. Cayrol cannot believe it is Denise. He would fain get away from her, throw off her hold of him. She raises her head, and the fire-light strikes upwards on her face, distorting the features. "Father! father!" she wails.

Yes, it is Denise. Bruised and sullied though she be,—for he deems her sullied while his instinct as a man and a father for the moment overmasters his reason, he knows her, he recognizes her. How she clutches at his dress, how her cry, "Save me; save me!" beats on his ears, how her hands cling and will not let go! If he rises, he must drag her bodily after him. So the fruit hangs on the bough that bears it, that has nourished it with its vital sap. Cayrol will never unbind the clasp of these hands, he will never throw off the burden of this life born of his life! Let him try to wave her off, to repulse her, against his own resolve his arms will fly open in the embrace of a father, a protector.

He hears a moaning voice,—and amid sobs and broken words of confession, the name of Fortunade:

"I should have died like her, if I had not trusted to you, father. Save me! save us! the child!"

The tears gush from Cayrol's eyes.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE morning twilight was struggling to pierce the window-curtains. On the table a candle burned low, the flame, sunk to a level with the socket, flickering feebly to assert itself against the grey haze of dawn that little by little invaded the room.

Denise stirred lightly; a step was approaching the bed. She felt some one was looking at her, and raised her heavy head on the pillow.

The contour of the cheeks, thin enough already, seemed to have altered still more since yesterday; the cheek-bones stood out in exaggerated prominence beneath the eyes with their great dark circles, while the eyeballs showed bloodshot between the wet lashes. The grey daylight and the yellow candle flame together hurt the poor, tired eyes that had no more tears left to shed, and Denise turned away her face to the wall.

Cayrol murmured :

"I have come to talk to you. I could not bear it, all alone there in my room. Are you equal to hearing what I have to say?"

"Yes."

"You must be worn out."

"Yes."

"Would you rather wait to hear what I have decided on?"

"I would rather know now."

He sat down on the edge of the bed.

"I will not say one word of reproach. Where's the use? And I shall make no lamentations. Reproaches and tears are equally unavailing in face of accomplished facts. I did not make a scene last night in my first consternation at the news; I shall not do so this morning, after a night's reflection. You may be assured."

"You forgive me, father?"

"I forgive you your duplicity. For the rest, you must find excuses for yourself, if you can. It will take time to forgive,—a lifetime. As for forgetting, we can never forget, neither you nor I, but we will live as if we had forgotten. Now tell me, what do you think of doing?"

"Whatever you please; I have no will of my own left. Command, and I will obey to the letter."

"You cannot stay on at Monadouze, so I have decided to send you to Paris. Your uncle will see after you. He has had *his* share too in the catastrophe. Of course I shall remain here; I have my duty to my patients—and we are not rich."

"I will not lay a fresh burden on you, father. I will work."

"What at? You have no profession, no trade."

"A woman of spirit can always win a livelihood for herself and—her child."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"So long as I live, you will want for nothing. When I am gone you will have a bare subsistence, nothing more and nothing less. As to—the child—I think it is needless to make plans far ahead."

The words roused Denise from her torpor, and she asked sharply :

"Why?"

Then passing her hands over her aching eyes, she added :

"I will never forsake my child."

"Who talks of forsaking it? You must bear, we must bear, all the consequences of—your weakness. If it lives, we will put it in trustworthy hands, and later on take it to live with us. No, don't thank me; it is our plain duty."

"Mine, not yours."

"Ours."

"A woman of my age is solely responsible for her actions."

"I ought to have known you better and looked after you better. No, don't argue; we have said enough."

His melting mood was over; the voice was calm, dry, almost peremptory in which he resumed :

"I said: 'If the child lives,' but I do not think it will. It is right you should know the facts: a dying man's child has a poor chance of surviving. And if it does, it will stand at a disadvantage as compared with other people. So is the mother already punished in her child. You were not like other girls of your class who are brought up on a pack of silly prejudices and romances. You knew what

underlies the words 'love,' 'marriage,' 'motherhood.' I had taught you the duties you owe the race. Other women who let themselves be seduced and become mothers of 'degenerate' infants can plead ignorance; you had no such excuse."

"I know my faults,—and I will expiate them. But my child must live."

"What sort of a child will it be!"

"Healthy or sick, it will be my child. I will devote my life to it. By sheer dint of love I will save it. I am strong; my blood is untainted, it is yours runs in my veins. The child will live. I mean it to live!"

"One day you will remember my words."

"Reproach me, insult me, if you will,—and I will not say one word. But this,—this prophesying death for my child, revolts me. I will not have it; never say such a thing again!"

Starting up in her bed, she wrung her hands convulsively in an agony of protest:

"No, no, don't say that! My child *shall* live. You, you hate the thought of the child, you disown it. But *I*, I am the mother. You will not, you cannot, hinder that."

"Poor girl, poor unhappy girl!" groaned Cayrol.

A wave of pity mastered him for the moment. He began to pace the room, with bent head and drooping shoulders, and Denise saw how sadly his whole look had suddenly altered. The shock had been too cruel; her father would never recover his old upright carriage and gallant bearing. A night had turned him into an old man.

He came back to the bed. Denise put up her naked arm to shield her eyes. Cayrol scrutinized her in silence; he remembered she was ill, and that he was a doctor. Questions rose to his lips which he hesitated to put.

Presently he asked :

"Are you certain as to your condition?"

"Quite certain."

"It was—how long ago—three months?"

"Yes."

"Don't be alarmed. Command your nerves. I am speaking to you as a doctor. It is my duty to look after you. Tell me what you have been feeling?"

But she faltered :

"No, I cannot tell *you*, father, I cannot talk of these things to *you*. I am ashamed to."

As a father he shared her scruples, but as a doctor he wanted to know the truth, however painful the knowledge. His eyes rested on the shape muffled under the bedclothes, which struck him as more ample, already a little unwieldy.

"No," he said, "we must think only of your health. Don't cry! trust to me, my child!"

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALBERT LAPEYRIE sat awaiting the expected news in a little room with lacquered walls and polished furniture, garishly lighted by one tall French window.

The nursing home, under the direction of a lady physician, Doctor Kousmine, stood back discreetly from the roadway, a white building set amid clumps of flowering shrubs, lilacs, hawthorns and privets, which in summer time embowered it in blossom, without excluding the light. Outside the gates stretched the Quai du Quatre-Septembre and its rows of tall poplars, while the Seine, with its verdant eyots in mid-stream relieving the sombre grey of the water under the grey sky, reflected the arches of the Pont de Boulogne and the hills of Saint-Cloud.

Presently Doctor Kousmine entered, still wearing her overall of coarse linen. A small woman, with a projecting brow, light-coloured eyes, a gentle smile and the milk-white complexion of a Russian blonde, she looked very young.

Lapeyrie asked her :

“Is it over ?”

“Over ! It is only beginning.”

“And it will last ?”

"Who can say?"

"Two hours, or twelve?"

Marfa Kousmine smiled:

"More likely twelve than two—and not much doubt of it, something over twelve."

"It is appalling."

"It is quite normal."

"And is everything going well?"

"Very well indeed—for the mother."

"The child is alive?"

"Yes, certainly, but it will be born very tiny, and its heart beats feebly. Perhaps we may save it."

Lapeyrie sighed:

"Ought we to wish it to live? I cannot say."

"Phthisis is not hereditary, but the ill-starred being, son and grandson of consumptives, runs a sore risk of contracting the disease, in his turn. Moreover, if he reaches manhood, his children will be, like him, victims ready made for the scourge. They will poison the race."

"You talk like my brother-in-law Cayrol."

"Your brother-in-law is a doctor; he can be under no delusion as to the health of his grandson to be."

"He has told his daughter these bitter truths!"

"To prepare her mind for a fresh blow."

"And to punish her."

"No, Monsieur, no," Mademoiselle Kousmine protested. "I saw Doctor Cayrol when, by your advice, he committed Madame Denise to my care. We had a long talk together. He is more grieved than angry. I can understand his state of mind."

His daughter's frailty hurts him like an act of treachery. At the same time he holds himself in part responsible."

"He has caused his daughter terrible remorse. Do you recollect her black despair when we brought her here first."

"She was full of remorse—because of the child."

"She has been much calmer for some weeks now."

"Do you know why?"

"She sees a chance of deliverance; she resigns herself to the risk of losing the child."

"The very opposite! As the time draws nearer, she is more and more convinced we are all mistaken, that the child will live. Her instincts as a mother rise in revolt against all prophecies of ill omen. She draws her confidence from the ineffable love she already feels for the little one. And, strange as it may appear to you, she never speaks of the father. Did she really love him?"

"Who knows?"

"If she ever did, she forgets him now. The child appropriates all her love. She sews and works for it; she asked me for books, the best books to suggest high and noble thoughts; she loves to look at flowers, pretty children. The poor creature tries her best not to be unhappy,—that might be bad for the little one!"

"What a terrible thing for her if——"

"I shudder to think of it!" declared Marfa Kousmine, and her pale blue eyes, under the slightly reddened lids, filled with tears.

"What a dreadful story it is!" she went on, with an amount of feeling that touched M. Lapeyrie. "Really we ought to teach our patients their duty, their plain duty to beware of spoiling their healthy, fellow-creatures' lives for them; your godson was a criminal."

"An unwitting criminal."

"A man turns craven in face of death: a woman cannot bear to see the man suffer so. Pity seconds selfishness,—and children are born doomed to misery."

"You will never stop men who suffer being selfish or women who love being weak. Loveless, childless women, whose hearts are brimming over with tenderness that has no outlet, always bestow it, and will always bestow it on nature's pariahs."

But Doctor Kousmine would not have it.

"No, no, pity must be educated, must be given eyes to see. That is not the same thing as abolishing pity. Do you suppose I cannot sympathize with all forms of suffering, physical and moral? Our hearts have a fount of tenderness and compassion that flows copiously for the unhappy, one and all. But the feeling in no case ought, or can, develop into love."

"In no case! You are sure of yourself, Mademoiselle?"

"Quite sure."

"You have never been tried!"

"Perhaps I have, and come out victorious perhaps. The one thing that has saved me from being betrayed by my feelings is——"

"Your experience as a doctor?"

"No, my love of children. Better renounce marriage altogether than bring degenerates into the world."

"You are not made for love."

"I should be a good wife. At any rate, I should try to be. Would you like to see Madame Denise?"

"Very much."

Marfa Kousmine rebuttoned the linen overall which she had thrown open over her black dress. Quick, alert, resolute, she guided M. Lapeyrie along the stairways and passages. Nurses passed them, carrying chubby-faced infants.

"Those are the 'big ones'!" explained Mademoiselle Kousmine. "They are three, four, and five months old. The mothers stay on here, in cases where they make a slow recovery."

"You love them all?"

"Yes, I love them every one."

She looked so young with her slim figure and pale flaxen hair as she moved lightly along that M. Lapeyrie thought to himself:

"No, she is not made for love; but she is a woman, for all her diplomas and degrees. Denise is in good hands."

The latter was knitting a night-wrap, sitting in an armchair beside a cradle. The lacquered walls of the room were coloured white,—the greenish white of snowdrops, very agreeable to the eyes and restful to the thoughts. The flowered window-curtains, the narrow bed, the unbleached mats that lay on the polished floor, made up a scheme of colour in

which whites and greens struck the dominant note.

And there in the middle of the room stood the empty bassinet ensconced in its muslin draperies, like a white egg in a nest of grey-green rushes.

Denise wore a peignoir over which her hair hung down in a long plait. The ascetic oval of the face, the downcast eyes and serious lips gave her the look of a Madonna in an early Italian picture. There was a touch of maidenliness about her still, modifying the mother's gravity, and her uncle looked at her with eyes of respect as well as pity.

Never a complaint had she uttered, accepting pain as a just ransom she must pay to destiny. Every act, every wish was subordinated to the good of the child. For its sake she had constrained herself to this serenity of mind and demeanour, till by dint of appearing calm she had won a sufficient degree of calmness. After so many shocks that had altered and disorganized her character, motherhood was bringing her back under the guidance of the deepest dictates of her nature.

She asked after her father, who had not written to her for four days now. Lapeyrie showed her a letter he had received that morning: "Veydrenne was in gaol for five years. The old *metje* was just dead. Madeleine Brandou was to marry Lionassou of the Bourg d'Eyrein. There was a great deal of measles and influenza about."

Of Cayrol's own secret thoughts not a word. He too was shamefaced in his sorrow; he cultivated an affected resignation that covered the sore, aching wounds to his fatherly affections and fatherly pride.

Denise murmured presently :

"Ah! when shall I see Monadouze again?"—and the words brought back to her mind's eye the old house roofed with the small, rough-cut slates, the garden where the pear-trees grew, the gorge of the river, the blue hills receding, fold beyond fold, shoulder cutting shoulder, to the far-away horizon of the Lot. Again she saw Jean Favières in the reclining chair, and the "youngsters" singing the Easter anthem. It was just such a day as this,—rain and sun alternating in a blue sky heavy with storm-clouds.

Her bosom rose in a sigh. Peace to the dead! Then her eyes fell on the cradle.

She felt something stir feebly within her, and wished it were not so light, this burden she bore, not so puny this life already threatened. The chill of a dreadful fear came over her, and she bit her lips.

"You are in pain?" asked Marfa.

"No."

But here a spasm of downright pain wrung a cry from her.

"Yes, I am. It is beginning again."

Lapeyrie asked :

"You are not afraid? You know *you* run no risk? You know you can trust Mademoiselle Kousmine?"

Denise's answer was :

"Let my father know. I should like to see him."

The child was born next day at dusk. But by

the time Cayrol arrived, Jean Favières' son had gone to rejoin Jean Favières.

And time went on, and Denise, a mere shadow of the old Denise, consented to live, for Cayrol's sake.

They left Boulogne towards mid-June. Marfa Kousmine broke into tears as she kissed Denise.

"Remember I am your friend, that my house is yours. If ever you find yourself left alone without claims on you or anyone to love, come to me. We will work together. There will always be ill-starred mothers here to save, and children to nurse."

Denise thanked her :

"If I had only myself to think of, I should stay now. But so long as my father lives, my place is by his side. I must remake some sort of happiness for him out of the broken fragments of our life. In years to come we shall meet again perhaps, you and I."

At Monadouze, Françoquette gave a cry when she saw Denise, grown so thin her old dresses hung loosely about her. The golden tresses were not so thick and had lost their ruddy glory and silky sheen of other days.

On the morrow, when the trunks were unpacked and every article had been put back in place, when the house had recovered its everyday aspect, Denise took her old seat in the dining-room by the window, her feet on a stool, her needle between her fingers.

The clock ticked,—the peaceful heart of the old house. On the grey panelled walls, between the stags' heads, the old-fashioned lithographs looked out dimly from their frames, while the gilded roses

on the barometer gleamed softly where the light fell on them.

The distant roar of the waterfalls filled the warm silence of the summer evening.

Denise, searching for something in her workbox, dropped a steel thimble, covered with rust, which fell tinkling on the floor.

Cayrol, who came in at that moment, picked it up, saying to his daughter :

“It is not yours.”

On her finger she wore the silver thimble, worn thin by long wear, that had belonged to her mother and her grandmother. She drew it off to put on the other thimble which had been Fortunade's.

A tear slipped down her cheek. With downcast eyes she bent over her work, as in former days.

THE END

